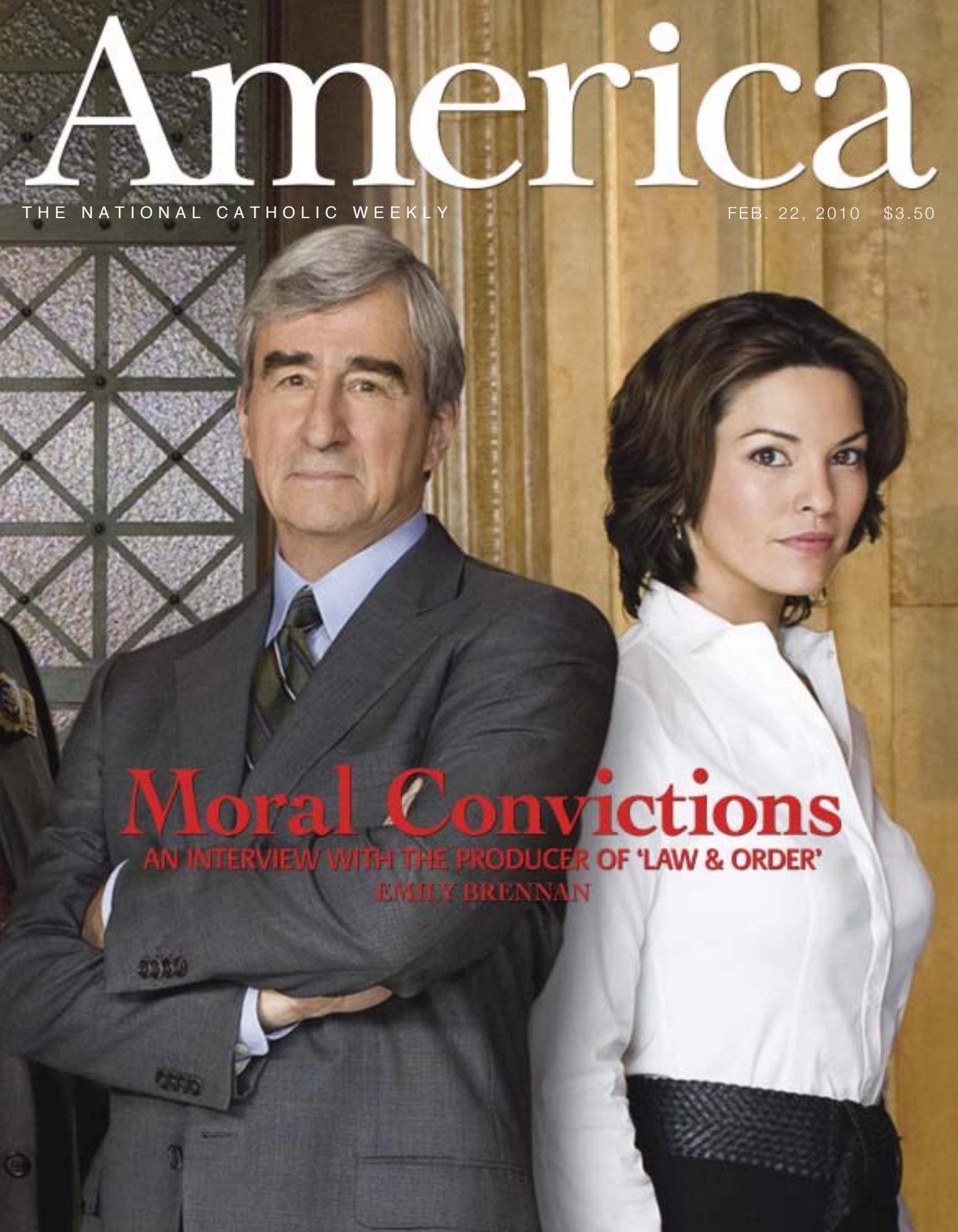


America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

FEB. 22, 2010 \$3.50



Moral Convictions

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PRODUCER OF 'LAW & ORDER'

EMILY BRENNAN

OF MANY THINGS

The LaFarge Lounge, named for the late John LaFarge, S.J., one-time *America* editor in chief and leader of the Catholic Interracial Council, may be the most impressive room at America House. The far wall features a central window with a dozen panes decorated with symbols of institutions associated with Father LaFarge's life and ministry.

The window includes an image of St. Ansgar, the ninth-century bishop of Hamburg and missionary to northern Germany, Denmark and Sweden, known as the Apostle of the North. The St. Ansgar pane memorializes Father LaFarge's 35-year-long association with St. Ansgar's Scandinavian Catholic League.

To commemorate the centennial of the league's founding, the bishops of Stockholm, Copenhagen and Reykjavik visited New York for a celebratory Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Feb. 6. The previous day they met in the LaFarge Lounge for conversation with *America's* current editors. For me, Norwegian on my father's side, my two days with the league and its guests were the fulfillment of a desire of many years to become involved with this association for Scandinavian-American Catholics. Only as the events approached did I learn this would be the league's last gathering.

St. Ansgar's League was founded in 1910 with the encouragement of Archbishop John Farley of New York and Bishop Charles E. McDonnell of Brooklyn. The league's principal founder, Frode Rambusch, had entered the Catholic Church in 1896 under the guidance of the Paulist Fathers. At its peak in the 1960s, the league had 1,000 members in 10 chapters. It provided fellowship for Scandinavian Catholic converts and those thinking of becoming Catholic.

The St. Ansgar Bulletin, published in English, was "the only journal in a universal language reporting on things

Catholic in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland." Besides meeting on the feast of St. Ansgar, Feb. 3, the league's members gathered each year to celebrate two Scandinavian festivals of light, Santa Lucia on Dec. 13, and Sankt Hans (John the Baptist) on June 19.

The Second World War and the years immediately afterward were a time of heightened activity, with Bishop Edward F. Swanstrom, a leading member of the league, appealing for aid to the Scandinavian churches. Sigrid Undset, the Nobel Prize-winning author of *Kristin Lavransdatter*, who was forced into exile by the Nazi occupation of Norway, lived in Brooklyn Heights and became an active member of the league. To Father LaFarge she was the symbol of the defenseless refugees victimized by the Nazi war machine.

Since World War II, when the U.S. bishops' war relief effort was headed by Bishop Swanstrom, St. Ansgar's League has provided support for the churches of Scandinavia. Today the Scandinavian Catholic churches are themselves welcoming refugees from wars in the Balkans and Iraq. When the decision was taken to disband, the league disbursed its remaining funds to the dioceses of the Nordic region: a gift from the children of Scandinavian immigrants to the United States to today's migrants to Scandinavia.

...

This week *America* bade farewell to Charles M. Whelan, S.J., who died on Feb. 2. For 45 years Charlie served as an associate editor—a record. He also taught law at Fordham University, where he specialized in constitutional law, church-state relations and legal writing. In the 1960s and 70s he was of counsel to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, hands-on legal work of which he was especially proud. May he forever enjoy the company of the saints.

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.

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Drew Christiansen, S.J.

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PUBLISHER
Jan Attridge

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Lisa Pope

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.
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Cover: Sam Waterston as Jack McCoy and Alana de la Garza as Connie Rubirosa in "Law & Order." Photo: NBC/Virginia Sherwood.

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Turning Back the Clock

Anscar J. Chupungco, O.S.B., may not be a household name, but the internationally known liturgical scholar commands respect among his peers. So when he called the Vatican's recent liturgical decisions an "attempt to put the clock back a half-century" and "a reform of the post-conciliar reform," liturgists took note. Father Chupungco, a Benedictine priest and former president of the Pontifical Liturgical Institute of Sant'Anselmo in Rome, was speaking at the inauguration of a liturgical institute in Brisbane, Australia, in January. He did not mince words. Recent Roman documents "are becoming increasingly perplexing," he said, lamenting their "absence of a historical and cultural approach to the liturgy" and "the inability to fuse together the two basic concepts of Vatican II's liturgical renewal, namely sound tradition and legitimate progress."

The recent changes—including Pope Benedict XVI's document on the increased use of Latin in Masses and the upcoming revisions of the English translation—are not alterations that concern only liturgical scholars. They will be felt by all Catholics. Perhaps that is why Father Chupungco, who directs a liturgical institute in the Philippines, spoke bluntly. "Liturgical reform requires serious academic work," he said, "not mere romantic attachments to the past that close the eyes to the reality of the present time. The drive for legitimate progress makes us run towards the realization of Vatican II's liturgical reform," he concluded, "but we should not run as if we did not carry on our shoulders the weight, both heavy and precious, of sound tradition." Sound tradition, in other words, includes not only an appreciation for centuries-old practices, but a scholarly emphasis on both the *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* that characterized the Second Vatican Council.

Tracks to Nowhere

Anyone who has been stuck in traffic on California-coast roads between Los Angeles and San Francisco likely longs for a faster, more reliable option for regional travel. President Barack Obama hopes that high-speed trains may be the answer. He has stated his intent to improve the U.S. rail system and is backing this up with \$8 billion from the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The allocation is meant to jump-start high-speed rail projects in California and 12 other regional corridors across the country and to provide additional funding for improvements to existing infrastructure in a total of 31 states.

The project is a worthy one: High-speed trains could

not only dramatically cut travel times but also decrease the gridlock on roads surrounding cities like Los Angeles, thus decreasing the amount of fuel wasted and the productivity lost by commuters. Unfortunately, the down payment is not enough to complete a single one of the proposed projects, and it is unlikely that cash-strapped states will have the funds to finish the work on their own.

California's plans are the most ambitious, with a line planned between San Francisco and Los Angeles and a second phase connecting the line to Sacramento and San Diego. The state received \$2.3 billion in federal aid, and in 2008 voters approved another \$10 billion in state funds. But the estimated cost for completion is \$45 billion.

Taiwan and Spain, among other countries, made great strides in building and rebuilding their infrastructures, but only after their governments made modernization of the rail systems a priority. With the proper funding and commitment, high-speed trains can and should be a part of American life within the next decade.

Mardi Gras 2010

"Mardi Gras may never end!" So spoke the winning quarterback Drew Brees after his New Orleans Saints defeated the Indianapolis Colts in Super Bowl XLIV. Surely Mardi Gras began early in the Crescent City and will continue with parades, festivities and jazz until the stroke of midnight on the the morning of Ash Wednesday. After the destruction of Katrina and years of frustration in professional sports, New Orleans finally has something to celebrate.

Not too far from those celebrations lies Haiti and the city of Port-au-Prince, another former French colony known for its Mardi Gras festivities. Will Haitians have the energy for celebration this year? Dare they celebrate? A golf course has become a tent city for thousands of homeless. Orphans seek families to care for them. Amputees try to put their lives together. Obviously, Mardi Gras celebrations will be subdued, yet Haitians will and must celebrate because it is deep in their Catholic tradition. So strong is faith in Haiti, that even as earthquake victims were pulled from the rubble, many Haitians sang God's praises.

Lent begins with ashes. Yet it ends not with the suffering and death of Good Friday, but with Easter, the day of resurrection. For Catholics, Mardi Gras serves as a reminder and minor anticipation of resurrection joy and life.

Mardi Gras in New Orleans and even in Haiti this year is possible because God's love is deeper and stronger than suffering, destruction and even death.

Housecleaning

In the aftermath of the housing crash of 2008, many analysts identified the cause as government policies aimed at expanding home ownership in the United States, particularly among U.S. communities that in previous generations had been locked out of the American dream house by mortgage redlining. The Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, meant to force banks to lend to the African-American and Latino “high risk” communities, was frequently pointed to as a culprit. But is the case against the C.R.A. really so solid? Even if it were, how should that affect national policy on home ownership going forward? Is the value of home ownership for all Americans still worth promoting?

The “blame the victim” narrative of the Great Recession may be more reliant on ideology than facts. More than 80 percent of the boom years’ problematic subprime loans were not even issued under C.R.A. regulations, and homeowners with C.R.A. mortgages have defaulted at a lower rate than other mortgage holders. The economic earthquake of the foreclosure crisis, which, if the C.R.A. were truly to blame, should have been domiciled mostly within U.S. urban communities, has been for the most part geographically specific, with regional centers in California, Florida, Illinois and Nevada accounting for about half of all foreclosures. It is true that some minority communities are experiencing higher rates of foreclosure in this crisis, but that is due more to the nature of the loans they received than to federal policies aimed at promoting home ownership among minority groups.

Low-income communities, exploited as opportunity zones for predatory lending, ultimately endangered the originating banks as much as they did the homeowners. Shaun Donovan, the secretary of Housing and Urban Development, has called those loans “a targeted scourge on minority communities.” Donovan reports that 33 percent of the subprime mortgages given out in New York City in 2007 went to borrowers with credit scores that should have qualified them for conventional and more affordable prevailing-rate loans.

But there was no federal regulation that required “zero down, interest only” and “teaser” loans destined to detonate later under the inexperienced and unwary. No government policy ever demanded that bankers abandon due diligence and caution in mortgage lending; but agog at remarkable

quarterly profits generated by the subprime market frenzy, bank executives and shareholders did exactly that. Aggressive brokers pushed adjustable rate mortgages on novice homebuyers with a wink and a nudge, suggesting they merely refinance when the ruinous interest rates kicked in, not warning them that this could prove impossible. Others were sold on interest-only mortgages with the naïve expectation that home values moved in only one direction: up.

As the nation emerges from its housing hangover, the temptation is strong to lay too much blame on the subprime mortgage holders who threw the spark to the tinder in 2006. Certainly tightening procedures on the streets where they live and where this crisis began is not a bad idea. Just as surely it is not enough to prevent a similar economic scorching in the future. We would be setting ourselves up for false security even as we condemn working-class American dreamers unjustly. Many may have signed mortgages they did not understand, but how many “analysts” on Wall Street recommended complicated derivatives and subprime mortgage packages they did (and do) not understand and whose risks they blithely and negligently ignored?

As a nation we responded to this crisis by bailing out banks and leaving soon-to-be ex-homeowners twisting in the historic downturn. Now, as the officers of the big banks insist it is time for them to get back to “business as usual,” which apparently means transferring risk to the taxpayer, little good can be achieved by further diminishing the reach of the C.R.A. Surely it would be more reasonable to recognize that the era of self-regulation, whether among the investment scions of Wall Street or the predatory mortgage writers at your neighborhood commercial bank, must end.

Broad-based homeownership remains a worthy goal for a nation reliant on a sturdy middle class to hold its ends together. It may surprise many to learn that in spite of foreclosure rates almost triple the norm, U.S. home ownership at 67.2 percent remains near historic highs, and the rate of home ownership among minority communities likewise remains at levels never seen before.

It would be a great injustice if one of the few groups forced to “reform” because of this debacle were the working class families who had finally been able to open the door to their American dream.



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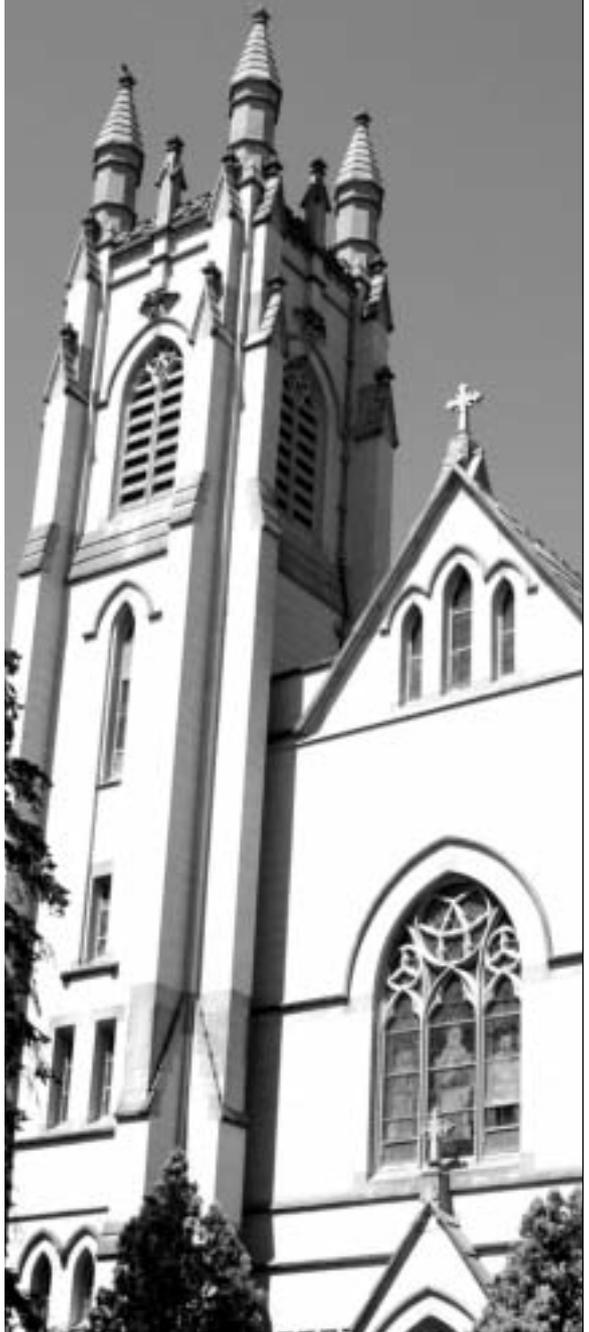
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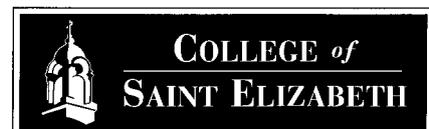
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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

WASHINGTON D.C.

Defense Review Reveals Shift In Military Focus

Dropping the long-held dedication to the type of military planning that committed the United States to fighting two major cold war-style conflicts simultaneously, the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review shifted its focus to the need to prevail in the country's far-from-conventional wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Defense Secretary Robert Gates introduced the results of the review in early February, along with a whopping \$548.9 billion defense budget request and an additional \$159.3 billion for "overseas contingency operations" in the 2011 fiscal year.

"Achieving our objectives in Afghanistan and Iraq has moved to the top of the institutional military's budget, policy and program priorities," Gates said. "We now recognize that America's ability to deal with threats for years to come will depend importantly on our success in the current conflicts."

Toward that end, the fiscal 2011 budget requests take additional steps to fill what Gates called "persistent shortfalls that have plagued recent military efforts, especially in Afghanistan" related to intelligence gathering and surveillance capabilities.

Gates said the cumulative effect of the 2010 and 2011 budget requests, along with the defense review recommendations "make sure this department is doing everything we can...to prevail in the wars we are in, while preparing our military to confront the most likely and lethal threats in the future."

Maryann Cusimano Love, associate professor of international relations at The Catholic University of America, said in an interview with **America** at this year's Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington that the review's shift from the two-war doctrine could be viewed as a "slap at the Air Force and the Navy.... [They've] been arguing that the type of conflict we are fighting now is really an exception, that we need to get back to cold war conflict [planning] against conventional armies."

Predicting that the United States will confront a number of smaller, unconventional conflicts and responsibilities in the future, the latest defense review, Love said, rejects that approach completely. "We're going to be called in for humanitarian relief in emergencies like Haiti while fighting counterinsur-

gency or counter-terrorism," said Love. "We're going to be asked to do a lot of different types of things simultaneously, and we're not really going to fight a conventional war," she added. "We need to be more flexible; we need to be adaptable; and we really need to be ready for the variety of conflicts."

Love said the review offered some positives: a greater emphasis on preventing conflict, supporting a stronger role in intercepting conflict by nonmilitary agents like the State Department and a commitment to more attention to peacebuilding among affected communities. Love added that Secretary Gates has demonstrated more willingness to cut back on large-scale Pentagon projects, "which is very hard to do in Washington," and said cuts so far "could be a warning shot" of more to come.

"But the bad news is the budget did not do more [to reduce spending]," she

U.S. Marines at a base in Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan on Sept. 3.



said. "There's still a whole lot of spending for traditional military hardware systems for fighting conventional wars against a Russia or a China that might emerge in the future, despite the defense review saying that if they ever were our enemies, they don't plan to fight us that way." Love said it was more likely that the next field of battle will not be littered with fallen soldiers and smoldering tanks, but e-mailed Trojan horses and cyberviruses. Frazzled hackers and security firewalls may represent the future of combat aimed at defeating an enemy electronically before a shot is even fired. "Putting a lot of money into conventional weapons really isn't going to help us with that," she said.

When all defense-related costs are figured in, said Love, despite all the nation's pressing needs, "we're still spending more than one third of the



budget [on defense], out of size with the threats we face, certainly out of size with what the rest of the world is spending. We have to ask: Who benefits? Is it really making us more secure or is it really making us less secure, since it is undermining our economic performance?"

GERMANY

Church Leaders: Keep Christian Party Identity

German church leaders have criticized Chancellor Angela Merkel's governing Christian Democratic Union for moving away from its Christian ethos. In an interview with the German newspaper *Rheinische Post* in late January,

Bishop Gerhard Müller of Regensburg said having the word *Christian* in a name should mean "something concrete."

"A party which stands for an unconditional defense of life and then begins to waver betrays itself and democracy. Humanity cannot be treated instrumentally—its dignity provides the frontier for political compromises," he said. He added that such parties "should abandon the current opportunism—people will not vote for anyone who fails to uphold their own principles."

Media analysts say the Christian Democratic Union's new coalition with the Free Democratic Party has moved it to the left and risked alienating conservative supporters. A recent poll showed 4 percent of practicing Catholics had resigned their membership in the party. Within the Christian Democratic Union, a group calling itself the Working Group of Committed Catholics has formed to discuss how to maintain the party's traditional Christian identity.

In January, Archbishop Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising told the weekly *Der Spiegel* that the party's tax policy had "proved beneficial above all for rich people," adding that he also objected to its support for stem-cell research and aspects of its family policy. "What's lacking for me is a decisive acknowledgment of the Christian faith and church—the C.D.U.'s

program talks only very generally about Christian values, which is too hazy," said Archbishop Marx, who heads the social action commission of the German bishops' conference. "The C in *Christian* carries an obligation toward Jesus Christ. It is not just an adjective like *liberal* or *social*, whose meaning can be freely interpreted," he said.

German government figures show Catholics make up 31 percent of Germany's population of 82.3 million, compared with 30.8 percent who belong to the Evangelical Church in Germany, a federation of Lutheran, Reformed and United churches. About 2 percent of Germans are Orthodox.

In a pastoral letter before the September elections, the German bishops urged voters to back candidates who would uphold "the firm order of values found in our constitutional law and Catholic social teaching." They said Catholics should support candidates who would defend life at all stages and maintain Germany's social security system at a time when child poverty was "a scandal needing quick eradication."



Archbishop Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising in Germany visits the northern Bavarian village of Scheyern in January 2008.

Bishops Respond to Attacks on John Carr

Bishops working closely with John Carr, who oversees the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, say new claims against him and the agency are false and “totally ridiculous.”

“I’m concerned about these attacks on John Carr, and I know they are false, and I think they are even calumnious,” said Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., who chairs the U.S.C.C.B. Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, the bishops’ domestic antipoverty initiative. “I am taking this to be a very sad, sad commentary on the honesty of some people in these pressure groups.”

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y., chairman of the U.S.C.C.B. Committee on International Justice and Peace, said he had worked with Carr for more than 30 years and “always found him to be a staunch opponent of abortion.”

A report released on Feb. 1 by the Reform C.C.H.D. Now Coalition, a group that includes the American Life League, Human Life International and Bellarmine Veritas Ministry, alleged “a systemic pattern of cooperation with evil” by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops because of Carr’s past involvement with the Center for Community Change and said the Washington-based organization “has lodged itself into the highest places of power in the U.S.C.C.B. while working to promote abortion and homosexuality.”

Carr, executive director of the U.S.C.C.B.’s Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, said he stepped down as chairman of the center’s board in February 2005, and the board never addressed those issues during his tenure. “My experience with C.C.C. was that it focused on poverty,

NEWS BRIEFS

Radio Soleil, the Catholic radio station in Haiti, resumed broadcasting on Jan. 24 from a makeshift studio in the back of a van parked in the hills above Port-au-Prince. • Working to ensure proper nutrition for all means bringing dignity to human lives and should be a top priority, Pope Benedict XVI said in a speech on Feb. 6 welcoming **Alfonso Roberto Matta Fahren**, Guatemala’s new ambassador to the Vatican.



The Rev. Desinord Jean broadcasts in Port-au-Prince.

• The costs of not enacting health care reform this year are “too dire” to permit that to happen, says **Carol Keehan**, a member of the Daughters of Charity who is president and chief executive office of the Catholic Health Association. • As the 30th anniversary of the murder of Salvadoran Archbishop **Oscar Romero** approaches, El Salvador’s bishops have agreed to write a letter to the Vatican supporting Romero’s canonization in an effort to move the process forward. • **St. Vincent’s**, the last surviving Catholic general hospital in New York City, is enmeshed in a struggle to keep its doors open and fulfill its mandate to serve the sick poor. It inherited \$700 million of debt after merging in 2000 with seven other Catholic hospitals in the metropolitan area.

housing and immigration and had no involvement in issues involving abortion and homosexuality,” he said. “When I served, the board never discussed or acted on any position involving these matters, and if they had, I would have vigorously opposed any advocacy for access to abortion or gay marriage.”

Vatican Suggests Ecumenical Catechism

A shared “ecumenical catechism” could be one of the fruits of 40 years of dialogue among Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and members of the Reformed churches, said Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. “We have affirmed our common foundation in Jesus

Christ and the Holy Trinity as expressed in our common creed and in the doctrine of the first ecumenical councils,” he told representatives of the churches. Opening a three-day symposium at the Vatican to brainstorm on the future of ecumenism, Cardinal Kasper said it is essential “to keep alive the memory of our achievements” in dialogue, educate the faithful about how much has been accomplished and prepare a new generation to carry on the work. He said the members of his council “proposed an ecumenical catechism that would be written in consultation with our partners,” but “we do not yet have any idea how such a catechism could be structured and written.”

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Green Shoots in the Desert

Lent is a time to remember we are desert people—called to risk following Jesus into his desert and our own. Deserts come in many guises: geographical and spiritual, searingly hot or witheringly cold, bathed in all-exposing light or swathed in impenetrable darkness. Whatever its character, the desert leaves you with little choice but to attend to the call to go deeper, to journey closer to the core of your being.

Last year I spent part of Lent in the deserts of southern California, and the lessons of the landscape came beating in: the badlands, so barren, unyielding, resistant to any kind of encounter and so much a part of my own heart. But between the rocks were the first glimpses of the wild flowers that would soon make the desert bloom. It reminded me of a chance meeting in the Sinai desert with a Bedouin wanderer who amazed us by taking a dry seed in the palm of his hand, spitting on it and inviting us to watch as it literally burst forth into green growth before our eyes. Lent is also an invitation to let that fresh new growth begin in our hearts.

By contrast, a more recent experience showed me that life, like that little seed, is not just a promise for the future but something we hold in the palm of our hands here and now, if only we could recognize and celebrate it. It happened in a small town in northern Canada. The invitation to visit this community took me completely by surprise, to say nothing of taking me to what felt, in the bleak dark of a winter night, like the middle

of nowhere. The snow-filled streets seemed to rise out of the gloom as the aircraft touched down. In hindsight, I think the town was trying to tell me, even then, that it was incubating remarkable things, but at that first moment of my arrival it felt like a dark night and a desert landing.

The town lies at the intersection of the east-west and north-south highways connecting the Pacific coast to the prairies and the East, and the wilderness of the Yukon to the balmy clime of Vancouver. There you can stand at that physical crossroads and allow the world to unfold around you as if you were at the focal point of a Google map. The world that unfolds might seem pretty desolate to the casual observer. But what if you move inward instead, into the soul of this place, into your own soul and see what seeds might be waiting there, to bloom and bear fruit when the time is right?

I did not have to wait long for the opportunity to do just that. I soon discovered in this small town, at the meeting-point of so many possibilities, a vibrant ecumenical group of Christians with all shades of theology but just one passion: to follow where Jesus leads them, out into the world and closer to God and each other. I found myself in two places at once: in a diocese that is bigger than Germany and at the same time in the intimacy of a family home, in conversation with new friends around a coffee table at which Henri Nouwen once celebrated the Eucharist in this same room with these same people.

It was there that I heard about a very particular vision of reconciliation, the Returning to Spirit program. It makes authentic and compassionate space possible where Native American people, damaged by the experience of being forcibly taken from their families to the harsh regimes of some of the mission boarding schools, talk with representatives of the church organizations responsible for doing the harm. Together they can reflect deeply on their experience, meet one another in it and move beyond it. Healing happens at the intersection of two raw experiences of pain, where the truth can be spoken and honestly heard. It is a visionary model for genuine reconciliation that will

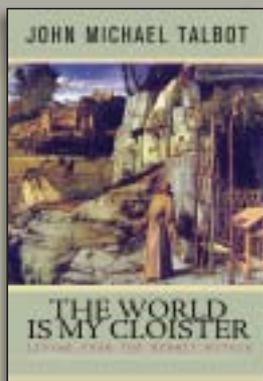
If you ask
for the grace
to put down
a deeper
root, God
will not fail
to surprise.

surely inspire healing in other areas of festering resentment and conflict. And it is all about returning to the true core of our being, where the spirit of God dwells, and honoring that spirit in each other. That same Lenten call re-echoes in our hearts every year at this time.

I cherish both these personal experiences of what at first appeared to be desert space, but where deeper reflection disclosed radical new growth. They are two different examples of the same truth: If you stand still and ask for the grace to put down a deeper root, God will not fail to surprise you with new possibilities. They are two different kinds of desert journey, back to the heart and true spirit of things, acknowledging the badlands and accepting God's invitation to smell the flowers.

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

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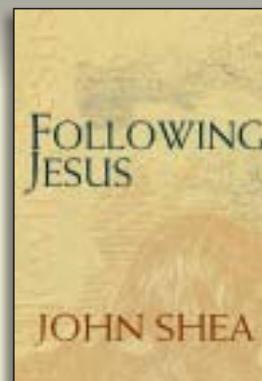
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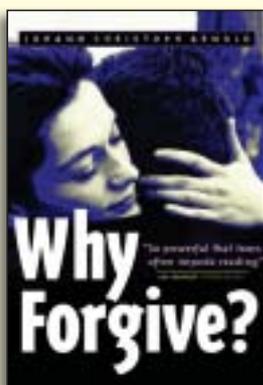
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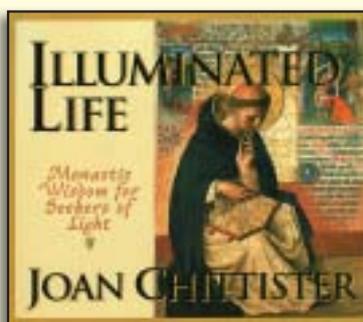
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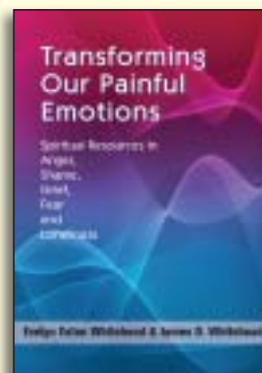
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A *volador* (flyer) de *Papantla* performs a pre-Colombian ritual to entertain tourists in front of Mexico City's Coca-Cola headquarters near Chapultepec park.



PHOTO: REUTERS/DANIEL AGUILAR



LOOKING FOR TRADITIONAL MEXICO
AMID BIG MACS AND PAMPERS

¿Adonde Vas, Mexico?

BY ROBERT JOE STOUT

Halfway across the *zócalo*, a central plaza typical of Mexican cities, in the little city of Tlaxiaco in the southern state of Oaxaca, I stopped, my appreciation of the mid-morning sunlight temporarily diverted. A middle-aged man and woman—obviously tourists—were sidling this way and that in a jerky, indecisive dance. The man held a camera that he lifted, lowered, moved from side to side, and the woman, fidgety, motioned him in one direction, then another, gesturing toward Tlaxiaco’s colonial cathedral.

Momentarily puzzled, I squinted toward what they seemed to be seeing and perceived the reasons for their dance: The man wanted to take photos of the cathedral, but if he moved to the left, the bulldozer that had been disgorging concrete from a street under repair crowded the composition. If he moved to the right, a canvas-topped portable tent announcing “Free Diabetes Testing” entered the frame. And no matter what angle he chose, two baseball-capped locals, one wearing a black jacket emblazoned with a pirate logo and the word *Raiders* and the other a sweatshirt bearing a bold *IDAHO* among a splay of pine cones, would be in the center of the photo, the hotdogs they were munching in plain view. The woman, catching a glimpse of me behind them, tugged the man’s sleeve, and he turned to approach me.

“Excuse please,” he said, his smile stiffly cordial and his words heavily accented in what I presumed was German. “You ask, please those men, they move? So the photo, you see, is the way, supposed to be.”

The way it is supposed to be... Like so many American and European tourists who come to Mexico and like many Mexicans who see in their

ROBERT JOE STOUT is a writer who lives in Oaxaca, Mexico. His books about Mexico include *Why Immigrants Come to America* and *The Blood of the Serpent: Mexican Lives*.

changing environment the corruption of traditional values by which they have defined themselves and their country, the couple wanted to photograph “Mexico Típico,” not a Mexico whose roots and communal values have given way to globalization. Capturing those snapshots is becoming a challenge in the new Mexico, where shopping malls abound, golf courses lure tourists to five-star beach accommodations and archeological sites are updated and their histories edited to appeal to foreigners. These days Mexicans consume more Coca-Cola and potato chips than do Americans or Europeans; meat has replaced beans as a principal source of protein; and television is a daily staple for the very poor as well as the middle-class and the wealthy.

Although government officials and entrepreneurs glorify Mexico’s traditions and religion, both serve merely as shiny hood ornaments for what actually is happening in the country. Since 1988 more than 20 million *campesinos* and subsistence farmers have been driven off their land, glutting cities with their poverty. Many of the farms they once owned have become grazing land for cattle or planted with eucalyptus for pulpwood. Millions more left rural communities whose agricultural production had for many years provided them with incomes.

The Great *Rompimiento*

Change has come much more rapidly than confidence in change. The great *rompimiento* (“breakup”) of Mexico’s traditional life began after the Mexican revolution (1910-24). Military movements and the conscription of civilians into the forces of Emilio Zapata and Pancho Villa drew both men and women out of their home communities, either as combatants or refugees. Often they did not return to their places of origin, choosing urban and semi-urban life instead. This trend escalated during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), when, according to Prof. Ricardo Pozas of the Autonomous National University, “The women and men were central figures in a redefinition politically and culturally of the state and its institutions, which they undertook with demonstrable civic enthusiasm.”

As this new, democratized Mexico took form, industrialization replaced agriculture as the government’s first priority. Migration to the cities increased; rural life, defined by sun and rain, daylight and dark, gave way to time-clock-regulated employment habits and the values associated with them. Children no longer automatically participated in their parents’ work life on subsistence agricultural plots, where contact with outsiders was extremely limited. Dislocated from communal roots, where roles were clearly defined and where the entire community adhered to the same norms,

Mexico’s new men and women, now wage- and salary-earners, adjusted to purchasing rather than producing their own food, clothing and household items. Church festivals and activities no longer dominated social life, and attendance and participation at Mass and confession waned. Urbanization ruptured the composition that integrated religious and social life, school and employment that had existed in rural communities or in smaller cities and towns.

A second *rompimiento* occurred when the United States contracted Mexican *braceros* to work in agriculture, sugar factories and for the railroads during the Second World War. With the postwar boom the *bracero* program expanded, and with it a surge of farm and industry labor-

ers headed northward. Thousands of others crossed the border on their own to look for farm and cannery work. A majority of them did not become—or even attempt to become—permanent U.S. residents. Their interaction with the communities in which they worked was relatively limited. Those most influenced by postwar U.S. values were people who lived in the border states and frequently passed back and forth from one country to the other.

Before the 1970s, impressions of life north of the border were based primarily on American movies and television sitcoms. That changed as more and more migrant workers returned to their home communities after working for U.S. wages and experiencing life in U.S. towns and cities beyond the border zone. Even those who were content in the familiar surroundings of their villages and ranchos re-entered Mexican society with their factory-made jeans, shoes and hand tools.

Norteamericano Things

Transistor radios replaced street corner musicians as an entertainment source; families added hotdogs, hot cakes and hamburgers to their diets. More and more autos appeared, many legally imported, others surreptitiously slipped across the border. Long before international franchises arrived, individual eateries in towns throughout northern and north-central Mexico began offering hamburgers, “Texas chili,” French fries and pizza. *Hormigas*—“ants,” the description given to smugglers of clothes, appliances, cosmetics, auto parts and other items—scurried back and forth to fulfill demands for U.S.-made goods, many of them secondhand and acquired at garage sales, Goodwill and Salvation Army stores in *el norte*.

A bus passenger riding from San Luis Río Colorado to Jalisco in the 1960s laughingly confided how embarrassed he had become going through customs when a Mexican offi-

Change has come much more rapidly than confidence in change.

cial opened one of his suitcases and pulled out a half-dozen women's brassieres, slips and nylons, then shrugged and observed in curt rural Spanish, "But these women, that is how they are; they want the *norteamericano* things."

The majority of those returning to their communities of origin in Michoacán, Durango, Zacatecas and Jalisco during the 1960s and 70s no longer wanted to live in "Mexico Típico," plowing rocky little hillside plots by hand, weaving baskets and riding mules, no matter how appealing such traditions might have seemed to the tourist trade. From the 1970s through the 1990s, more than a million Mexican citizens emigrated to the United States every year. Ties between newly formed communities in the United States and the communities of origin in Mexico tightened, in part because of the millions of dollars that workers sent home but also because, culturally, those who remained in Mexico felt increasingly comfortable with American habits and customs.

When a group of workers who had returned to Oaxaca in southern Mexico described the arduous working conditions they had encountered in North Carolina meat and poultry processing plants, one of them burst out: "But after the work, remember? The Budweiser and Kentucky [Fried Chicken]!" Another agreed, "Ay! I would love to have the Budweisers and a tub of Kentucky right now!"

Consuming Culture

In 1910 Mexico had a population of slightly over 16 million people, most of whom lived on what could be produced locally. Most of them identified with their places of origin; neither radios nor television sets existed, and very few newspapers reported what was happening in distant parts of the country, much less the world. An estimated 90 percent of the population was illiterate; the child mortality rate was over 50 percent in many areas; and government was in the hands of wealthy *hacendados* (big landlords) and *caciques* (tribal chiefs).

Today nearly 80 percent of Mexico's 110 million inhabitants live in urban areas, most of them congested and scourged by inflation, crime and underemployment. They buy clothes and school supplies at Walmart, use disposable diapers, watch American movies and file for divorces even as they retain their preference for handicrafts, *atole* (a kind of porridge) and the Virgin of Guadalupe. No longer do they automatically refer to themselves with the pronoun "we" (as in "We Mexicans believe..."; "We Mexicans always do..."; "We Mexicans love..."), as they commonly did in the 19th and first two-thirds of the 20th centuries. Instead they say, "I." A rupture in identity, a break with a past that defined "who I am" and collectively "who we are," thrusts the modern Mexican into an uncomfortable indi-

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vidualism, where the rules of behavior are less clearly defined. Part of the reluctance to give up traditional identities is the “something missing” that urban dwellers in particular feel. They share a sense that they have lost something essential in the transition from “tortillas, hand-made, filled with beans and chilis eaten together amid laughter and songs” to “white bread and telenovelas taken on the run,” to use the words of a Mexico City schoolteacher who moonlights as a parts inspector for an electronics manufacturer.

But cultural practices and niceties that worked in the ethnically compact geography familiar to the *campesino* do not work in urban areas, where modern Mexico’s workers commute between apartments and time clocks but no longer share equivalent ethnic backgrounds, religion or customs. The clear demarcations between good and bad, the expectations of conduct between adults and children and the exaggerated courtesy paid to women that characterized provincial life during the 19th and early 20th centuries have become as incongruous amid the 21st-century reality of industrialization, money laundering and migration as 1930s’ Pedro Infante singing cowboy movies or street corner *pulquerias* (where a person could enjoy a *pulque*, the fermented sap of the maguey plant).

This is not to say that most Mexicans want to destroy the “old ways” or forget about them. “We carry the past with us, we adapt it to the present, but it’s always there. It’s what we build on,” Fernando Horcasitas, a Mexico City college professor, insisted years ago. “Building on them” implies not only recognizing what is good and what is bad, but also what is practical and what is possible.

This urban generation of Mexicans acknowledge their parents’ and grandparents’ devout Catholicism, submission to authority and patriarchal double standard of morality without themselves subscribing to them. They may go to Mass, but they ignore the church’s negation of condom use. Many individual priests and churches have tried to adapt to the changes, even as the Catholic hierarchy maintains strong

ties with the conservative government of President Felipe Calderón. “When the [hierarchy] seems to support the government, many of those who are striving for change pull away, creating social divisions within the church as well as with the pop-

ulace,” the Rev. Manuel Arías, of Oaxaca, said.

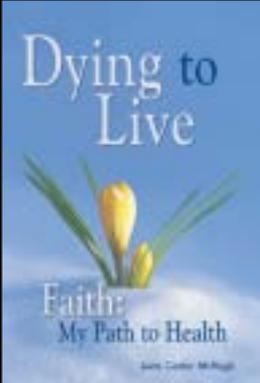
While the 30 or so wealthiest families (and a more or less equal number of drug cartel capos) buy airplanes and yachts, build five-star hotels and surround themselves with armed bodyguards, the rest of Mexico struggles to meet daily expenses. A bag of Big Macs, a pack of disposable razors, a dozen throwaway diapers are quicker and easier to come by than the “traditional” ways, even though those ways may have been more satisfying.

Wryly, Julio Hernández, a columnist for Mexico City’s daily paper, *La Jornada*, credits these wealthiest families and the politicians they control with re-establishing some traditions. Unfortunately most of them derive from the Middle Ages, the Inquisition and imperial rule. They repave the past with concrete, steel and debt, whisk naked indigenous children out of sight, send their children to private schools and worship the Virgin of Guadalupe one day a year. They fill the country’s jails with dissidents, parlay untaxed drug profits into multibillion dollar gains, huff like a barnyard rooster at perceived criticisms and extol the patriotic spirit of “those who love Mexico.” Meanwhile millions of Mexicans brave death and imprisonment to migrate, and political candidates bore holes in the pyramid of Teotihuacan to give tourists “the most fabulous light show in the world.”

What really matters in this continuing, complex confrontation between Mexico’s overburdened past and its growing expectations for the new century? Tradition? Or a new and better future built on a solid grasp of cultural reality and a meaningful commitment to sharing the national wealth? Maybe the next generation of Mexicans will be able to decide for themselves.

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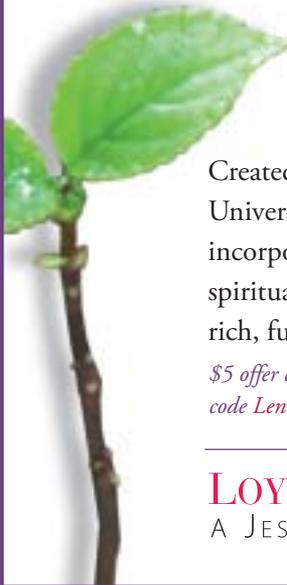
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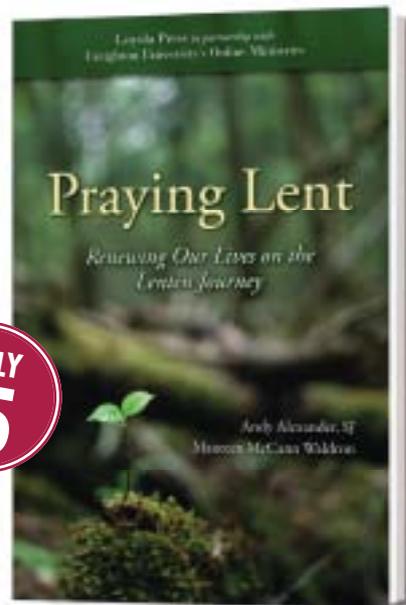
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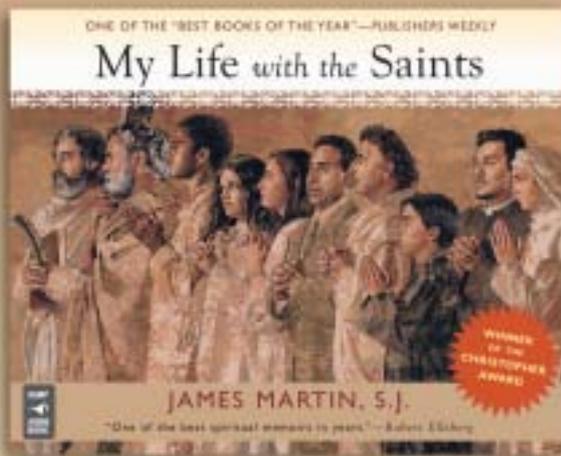
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Troubled Waters

Catholic-Jewish relations in the United States have grown strained.

BY JOHN BORELLI

Exchanging public statements is a poor way to conduct dialogue. But for the past several months Catholic bishops and Jewish leaders have been doing just that about two topics that cut close to the heart of the relationship between the two communities: the status and relevance of God's covenant with the Jewish people and the nature of Catholic-Jewish dialogue. Few issues could be more sensitive.

The proximate cause of the recent exchange was *A Note on Ambiguities Contained in Covenant and Mission*, a statement made public June 18, 2009, during the bishops' semi-annual meeting. The note, prepared by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' committees on Doctrine and Pastoral Practices and on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, is mostly a critique of the Catholic side of a joint statement with Jews titled *Reflection on Covenant and Mission*, issued seven years ago. Jews and other observers view the note as one more step backward for Catholic-Jewish relations and for the ecumenical and interreligious outreach of the U.S.C.C.B, which was already deteriorating through a series of events over the last several years. While steps have been taken to resolve substantive differences between the two sides, questions about the conduct and supervision of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and about trust between the parties are still to be addressed.

Reflections on Covenant and Mission

By itself, the bishops' note bears three new and troubling features that fall short of usual standards for dialogue. First, never before has the Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Committee officially criticized the work of one of its own dialogues. Previously, the U.S.C.C.B. has prepared responses to certain developments or occasionally to dialogue texts. But past responses never included the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs if the work of a dialogue group under its own sponsorship was under scrutiny. *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*, the text criticized by

JOHN BORELLI, *special assistant to President John J. DeGioia of Georgetown University since 2004, served as associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops from 1987 to 2003. He is currently national coordinator for dialogue for the U.S. Jesuit Conference.*

the bishops in their June note, was a joint statement of that committee's dialogue with the National Council of Synagogues. Unfortunately, the press release issued with *R.C.M.* incorrectly identified it as a statement of the bishops' conference rather than of one of its dialogues. Although this was corrected at the time and the text was even removed from the U.S.C.C.B. Web site, the note worries that since *R.C.M.*'s appearance "some...have treated the document as authoritative."

Second, the level of authority for national dialogue texts was never a concern before. They can claim no more authority than that of the scholars and others, including church officials, who prepare and release them. While their consensus usually carries considerable weight, not until sponsoring bodies receive these texts formally or officials cite them approvingly do agreed texts acquire any official weight.

The bishops observe that this Catholic-Jewish dialogue text "was not subject to the same review process that official documents undergo." That would apply a procedure for approval of dialogue texts not then in effect and implies that such review will be imposed now and in the future. Review by an outside group, even a doctrine committee, before a dialogue group can release a text would undermine the dialogue process by unilaterally imposing controls on the partner in dialogue and undercutting the standing of the Catholic interlocutors. Pending official reception or rejection, control should be exercised by careful appointments, not on what the appointees wish to say.

Third, the bishops' note came out during the U.S.C.C.B.'s June meeting, usually planned as a nonworking session when observers and the press are absent. These meetings were originally intended as retreats or a time for relaxed consultation among bishops, unlike the November meetings, when most deliberations are public except for specially designated executive sessions. At both their June 2008 and 2009 meetings, the bishops agreed in private to actions that have negatively affected Jewish relations.

At the June 2008 meeting, bishops had voted in favor of replacing a sentence in the American catechism, "Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them." The replacement text is mostly a quotation from St. Paul's Letter to the

Romans (9:4-5). The new wording approved was: “To the Jewish people, whom God first chose to hear his word, ‘belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ.” Speaking for the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, the Rev. James Massa explained that the expunged wording “was not flat-out wrong” but “was ambiguous and needed to be qualified.”

One wonders what was so ambiguous. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares that “the Old Covenant has never been revoked” (No. 121). Replacing and not editing the sentence in the American catechism indicates that the U.S. bishops felt something was wrong with referring to the covenant as “eternally valid” for Jews, even with qualification.

The U.S.C.C.B. announced on Aug. 27, 2009, that Rome had given permission for this change. The announcement explains that it “clarifies Catholic teaching on God’s covenant with the Jews” and further that “Catholics believe that the Jewish people continue to live within the truth of the covenant God made with Abraham, and that God continues to be faithful to them.” There are no reasons given why a shift from the covenant “through Moses” to the earlier covenant “with Abraham” and why the somewhat awkward expression “to live within the truth of the covenant” represent improvements, especially for catechesis. The announcement appeared several days after Jewish representatives had sent a firm response to the bishops’ June note.

The Jewish Response

Jewish representatives of five organizations responded to the June 2009 action by a letter on Aug. 18 to the signers of the note. While many Jews, especially Orthodox Jews, declare that they have no business telling Catholics what to believe, this letter points out that the note seems “to posit that the Mosaic covenant is obsolete and Judaism no longer has a reason to exist.” What is certainly lacking in the note and other recent U.S.C.C.B. announcements is the key term in the English rendering of Rom 11:29 in the New American Bible (the Bible translation officially authorized by the U.S.C.C.B.), “for the gifts and the call of God are *irrevocable*.” Declaring that the covenant was never revoked—using John Paul II’s often stated interpretation of Vatican II’s teaching—thwarts any supersessionist view to the contrary. (Supersessionism is the belief that the church, the “New Israel,” displaces the Jews as God’s people.)

But the primary concern of Jewish leaders with the note was another matter entirely: the nature of dialogue itself. “A declaration of this sort,” they wrote, “is antithetical to the very essence of Jewish-Christian dialogue as we have understood it in the post-Vatican II era.” To them, the bishops seemed to state “that Catholics engaging in dialogue with



Pope Benedict XVI observes a moment of silence during a ceremony at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem in May 2009.

Jews must have the intention of extending an implicit invitation to embrace Christianity and that one can even imagine a situation in such a dialogue where this invitation would be made explicit.” Their reply to any invitation to baptism was unequivocal: “Jewish participation becomes untenable” when dialogue becomes “an invitation, whether explicit or implicit, to apostatize.”

Representatives of five groups with decades-long relationships with the U.S.C.C.B. signed the response—the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the National Council of Synagogues and two Orthodox Jewish organizations: the Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America. Their complaints were heard, for on Oct. 2 five bishops replied: Cardinal Francis George, president of the bishop’s conference; Archbishop Wilton Gregory and Bishop William Lori, chairmen of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and of Doctrine; and the two longtime co-chairmen of these dialogues, Cardinal William Keeler and Bishop William Murphy.

They indicated they would excise the two sentences on

baptism and dialogue and issued a “Statement of Principles for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue,” which includes a strong denial that dialogue is a “disguised invitation to baptism” or will ever be used “as a means of proselytism.” That helps because most of these bishops, and now also Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, who was recently named to replace Cardinal Keeler in heading Jewish relations for the U.S.C.C.B., are the people primarily responsible for promoting these relations. (See Archbishop Dolan’s “A Shared Path,” *Am.*, 2/1.) Still, though the offending words are removed from the bishops’ note, Jews must wonder what the bishops truly believe is the relationship between dialogue and baptism.

Interpreting ‘Nostra Aetate’

Speaking in 2004, Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, summarized what Vatican II’s “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” (*Nostra Aetate*), accomplished for Jewish relations: “In this declaration the church expressed regret for every form of anti-Semitism, it affirmed its Jewish roots and, with reference to the Epistle to the Romans, the continued validity of God’s covenant with Israel.” He also explained that St. Paul’s idea of a covenant (Rom 11:29) not revoked is “so important in this new time

of relations...that it should not be treated in isolation and apart from the whole multi-layered New Testament covenant theology.” The current weight of Christian biblical and theological scholarship favors such a single covenant. *Nostra Aetate* also put an end to supersessionist views, that the old covenant ended and that the church has replaced the Jews as God’s people. An adequate Christian account, following Cardinal Kasper’s advice, would need to reject any vestige of a replacement theory as well as avoid any suggestion of two independent, ongoing covenants.

In 2002 the dialogue text *R.C.M.* attempted to address, from the Catholic side, the relationship between mission and dialogue in light of “a deepening Catholic appreciation of the eternal covenant between God and the Jewish people.” That text consisted of a preface and two parts, one by the Catholic side and the other by the Jewish side. Some critics felt that the Catholic section needed more careful attention to the complex relationship between mission and dialogue. Others criticized what they saw as an overall imbalance, because the Jewish section did not address in theological depth the relationship Jews have with Christians. Among the critics was Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., who rebuked the Catholic participants for making it appear that the universal call to conversion does not apply to Jews and for insufficiently testing their positions on the covenant against the whole New Testament (*Am.*, 10/21/02).



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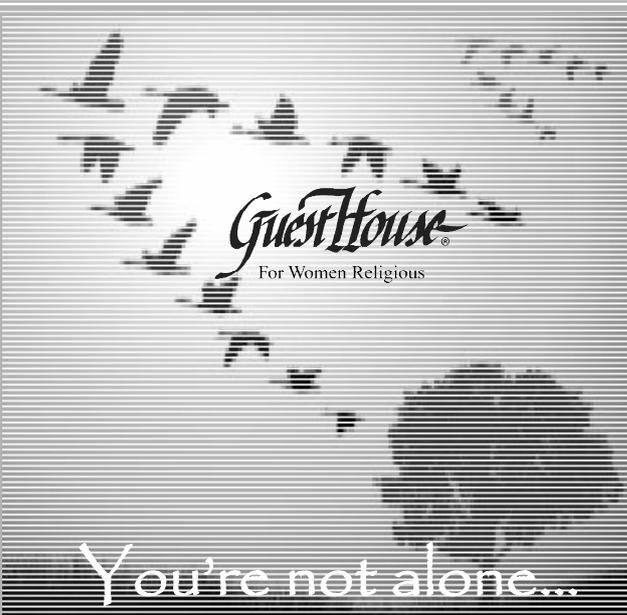


Healthy as it is for internal Catholic discussion on mission and dialogue to be out in the open, the bishops' recent note comes across as a unilateral and premature attempt to be doctrinally precise, jeopardizing the relationships with Jews necessary for dialogue. Such precision is prone to overstatement. The Orthodox Jewish scholar Rabbi David Berger, a signer of the Jewish response in August, called the reference to baptism "a bolt from the blue." Public revision continues. As promised, a new version of the bishops' note is now posted on the U.S.C.C.B. Web site with the offending sentences removed. The revised text repeats its criticism of *R.C.M.* for failing to develop a vision of mission and dialogue that incorporates the core elements of proclamation and invitation to life in Christ, but offers no examples or references.

Furthermore, the committees' explanation of the covenant in the note and the change in the catechism obfuscate *R.C.M.*'s summary of teaching from the pontificates of Paul VI and John Paul II on God's unrevoked covenant with the Jews. The revised note fails to mention the Vatican's *Guidelines on Religious Relations With Jews*, issued in 1974, which acknowledged the Christian obligation to witness and preach Christ as well as not to repeat supersessionist mistakes and proselytizing abuses of the past against Jews in the name of mission. From 1980 on, Pope John Paul II referred to the Old Covenant as "never revoked by God." This Vatican-II mentality gives priority to nurturing relationships between Christians and Jews rather than to impatient and unilateral attempts to impose doctrinal purity on unsettled questions.

Healing a Troubled Relationship

The way out of the current messy situation is to recall what Vatican II encouraged: joint review of relevant biblical texts, especially St. Paul's Letter to the Romans but also the Letter to the Hebrews, which was used by Cardinal Dulles in his criticism of *R.C.M.*, and any other relevant New Testament passages that seem to offer contrary or different views. Catholic biblical scholars and theologians should invite Jewish scholars to assist them with this task. In dialogue, for the sake of clarity and avoidance of misunderstanding, they might also share their understandings of "covenant," particularly as expressed in Jeremiah 31, with reference to the covenant's renewal in light of current Jewish and Christian self-understanding. Internal Catholic discussion of dialogue and mission should be informed by joint reflections on the experience of Jews and Catholics in dialogue. Both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have addressed these topics. Jews and Catholics might also share their perceptions of the present state of papal teaching. Joint scholarly study by Jews and Christians on these questions is sorely needed, not more unilateral actions that ignore the fruits of the Catholic-Jewish dialogue of the past 45 years. **A**



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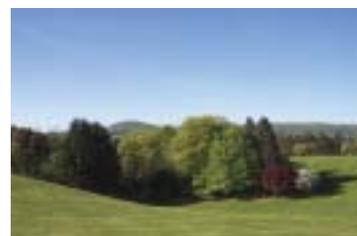
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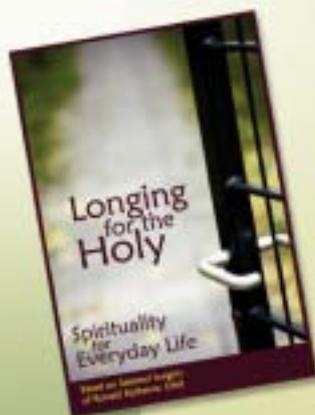
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BOOKS & CULTURE

TELEVISION | EMILY BRENNAN

MORAL CONVICTIONS

An interview with the producer of 'Law & Order'

After working as a crime reporter in Montreal, Canada, René Balcer landed a television gig in 1990 writing for a new police drama created by the Hollywood screenwriter Dick Wolf. It was supposed to be NBC's next big hit, but that show, "Nasty Boys," was canceled in midseason. Balcer went on to write for Wolf's other pilot, an underdog series called "Law & Order" that was gaining critical attention. Unlike such popular dramas as "L.A. Law" and "Hill Street Blues,"

the show focused on the criminal proceedings rather than on the cops' and lawyers' personal lives. Shot with hand-held cameras, "Law & Order" also had a gritty style that looked like nothing else on network television at the time. Last September, "Law & Order" began its 20th season, tying with "Gunsmoke" for the longest-running prime-time drama in American history.

In this conversation, Mr. Balcer, now the show's executive writer and producer, talks about the drama's abil-

ity to remain topical as it draws from headlines and debates relating to terrorism, torture and abortion that were unimaginable 20 years ago.

How did your earlier career in reporting affect your television writing and producing?

It gave me an appreciation of what detectives see on the ground, the kind of decisions they have to make, how they get sensitized and desensitized to the violence they encounter. Detectives see people at their worst moment in life; that colors their perspective. But good detectives can talk to anybody, be it a drunk on the sidewalk or a bank president, and make that person feel he is their best friend.



The current cast of 'Law & Order'
Inset: René Balcer

PHOTOS: NBC PHOTO/VIRGINIA SHERWOOD

“Law & Order” is often advertised as “ripped from the headlines.” What is the process behind fleshing out a news story into a teleplay?

We take the headline and use it as a jumping-off point from which we tell an entirely different story. We focus on what kind of issues the story raises and what it says about human nature.

A recent episode drew from an attempted bombing of a Jewish center in Riverdale, N.Y., in May 2009, in which a police informant gave plotters a fake explosive substance and the New York Police Department apprehended them. How did you use this as a jumping-off point?

One of the problems with terrorist investigations is the police’s reliance on informants. It’s difficult for undercover cops to infiltrate terrorist cells because the cells deal only with people they know. This is a problem not just for New York and the United States but also for international terrorist investigations. Getting inside Al Qaeda is impossible unless you start working with someone who is already in it. It’s dicey when you’re relying on civilian informants, who had been active plotters and have now decided to cooperate.

The case of the attempted Riverdale bombing is about terrorism, but we built the episode around the informant. This character became interesting in the context of his personal dilemma, as well as the compromises he had to make to maintain his credibility with the friends he’s informing on and with the police. A lot of informants used in terrorist investigations are recent immigrants, and the police have no choice but to work with what they’ve got.

Detective Cyrus Lupo, played by Jeremy Sisto, was formerly a member of the N.Y.P.D. Intelligence Division, which investigates terrorist cells abroad.

What was the inspiration for this character?

The N.Y.P.D. maintains around 70 detectives who are posted overseas for two to four years. These detectives do not have authority to carry a weapon or make arrests; they interact with local police to get advance information, such as terrorist and suicide-bombing methods, that would be useful to the N.Y.P.D.’s investigations back home. These detectives are also sent to gather intelligence on possible terrorist plots in New York City. In fact, a number of detectives were stationed in Afghanistan and Iraq back in 2001 and 2002, conducting and assisting in interrogations of detainees. The program started right after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, and the division has been very effective, sometimes more effective than the F.B.I. or the C.I.A., in collecting information overseas.

That’s what Detective Lupo did prior to joining the precinct on “Law & Order.” It gives him a different perspective on his job, on the city, on America. He has a more worldly view of things than other characters we have seen on the show. I’ve always loved *Lord Jim* types; he’s a very romantic character.

In this season’s premiere, the Manhattan district attorney, Jack McCoy, played by Sam Waterston, prosecuted a former Justice Department attorney for “depraved indifference murder” because the interrogation techniques he sanctioned in a memo, drafted in New York City, led to the death of an Abu Ghraib prisoner. What was the reaction to the premise?

Salon.com and Huffington Post loved it. Sean Hannity and Bill O’Reilly hated it. They thought this was René Balcer’s liberal fantasy. How dare the show take the Bush administration to task, they suggested, and what’s wrong with torture anyway? The fact is that in a 2002 memo, before he was attor-

ney general, Alberto Gonzales wrote that one of his real concerns was that a local district attorney might prosecute a member of the administration for torture. He envisioned the possibility. I know some localities—Berkeley, for example—are looking into how they can assert such jurisdiction. So it’s not so far-fetched.

How are real crime scenes different from those portrayed on television?

You can show as much blood and guts as you want, but what you can’t show is the smell of blood and charred flesh.

In an interview with NPR’s “Fresh Air,” Dick Wolf called the first half of the show a murder mystery and the second half a moral mystery. Why a “moral mystery,” and not just a “legal mystery?”

In the second half, you dig into questions about the administration of justice: Should we prosecute? What is the measure of justice here? Should we make a deal? What are the different levels of culpability and liability? As these questions get answered, the fundamental issues arise.

A recent episode, for example, was based on the shooting of George Tiller, a doctor who performed late-term abortions. The real trial had not yet occurred, but on the show there is a justification defense: The defendant shot the doctor in order to prevent him from performing a late-term abortion. So the doctor was killed in defense of a particular life.

The show’s trial explores different aspects of the abortion debate. The defense invites testimony from a woman who had discussed on television her decision to take her pregnancy to term, rather than do a late-term abortion, even though her child would be born missing half her brain and would not live more than a day. The defense argued that the defendant had seen this woman’s story, [and that it]

affected his thinking about abortion [and motivated him to murder the doctor]. During the courtroom testimony, the woman explains that, though her child died in her arms, this was her way of respecting the child's dignity. The witness makes clear, however, that she is not anti-abortion, that it was just the right decision to make. After hearing this testimony, the assistant district attorney, Connie Rubirosa, suddenly rethinks her take-no-prisoners pro-choice position. She is now asking where...my privacy ends and where another life's dignity begins.

In terms of the "moral mystery" in the second half, we are re-evaluating Roe v. Wade and the assumptions that buttressed it 35 years ago. For example, certain birth defects were death sentences then, but now in many cases medical advancements can offer a quality of life not previously available. Now we have a bill of rights for disabled Americans. How does that affect fetuses with disabilities? Aren't their rights protected? A lot of the ground rules have changed.

So is Roe v. Wade a decision to be revisited? Should it be put back to the

states to decide? Should the viability of a fetus outside the uterus, which is usually at 22 weeks, become a factor as far as abortion on demand is a defensible position?

There have been a number of Catholic characters over the years on "Law & Order," and certain archetypes have emerged. Jack McCoy is lapsed but with righteous moral convictions; Detective Mike Logan was a cynic, having been sexually abused by a parish priest; Detective Rey Curtis was devout. What unites these characters? Do they all have savior complexes?

(Laughs.) I suppose all these characters

have that social activist side to Catholicism, the kind of activism that Pope John Paul II hated and that led him to suspend that Nicaraguan priest [Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann for his involvement in the Sandinista National Liberation Front]. I think the belief in public and community service is the common ground where these characters would meet.

EMILY BRENNAN is assistant director of the Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life at Columbia University in New York City.

look up from the streets below. McCann watches these watchers with profound insight as he reveals how each of them walks various moral, psychological or theological tightropes of their own. He focuses especially on those who have experienced some version of collapse in their own lives. Some have fallen into addiction or prostitution, while others have been felled by grief over soldier sons who died in Vietnam. The novel lovingly unearths the remnant beauty beneath the layers of grief, grime and guilt that can characterize contemporary urban life.

While the tightrope walker holds this spinning novel together, the pivotal character driving the novel's plot forward is John Andrew Corrigan, a young Irishman from Dublin who has taken religious vows and has come to New York as an urban monk to minister among the city's poor. Corrigan is equal parts Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day and the whiskey priest from Graham Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory*. He preaches through acts of solidarity, not through sermons, and finds beauty in the midst of all kinds of social ugliness. His brother Ciarran narrates the early portion of the novel and comments about Corrigan, "What was ordeal for others was grace for him."

Corrigan's altruism emerged early in his boyhood, in the context of his fractured family, when he gave away blankets and clothing to homeless men on the streets of Dublin. He studied briefly with the Jesuits, who "gave a rigor to his faith," but "he needed more space for his doubt," and he finds New York's urban poor much in need of solace and his unique version of religion. His brother affirms, "His presence sustained people, made them happy, drew out their improbable yearnings."

McCann shifts the novel's focus from Corrigan, without ever completely leaving him behind, to consider the

ON THE WEB

Maurice Timothy Reidy reviews the film "The White Ribbon."
americamagazine.org/culture

BOOKS | GERALD T. COBB

HIGH-WIRE ACT

LET THE GREAT WORLD SPIN

A Novel

By Colum McCann
Random House. 368p \$25

Colum McCann won the 2009 National Book Award for *Let the Great World Spin*, one of the more intriguing, artful works of fiction to appear in the past 10 years.

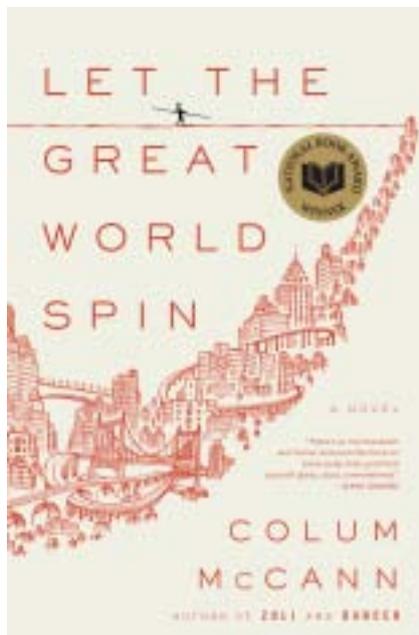
McCann's novel reflects a profoundly Christian imagination at work in subtle and complex ways. If you read only two novels this year, I suggest that you read *Let the Great World Spin* twice.

McCann uses the 1974 walk by Philippe Petit on a tightrope wire stretched between the towers of the World Trade Center to frame portraits of New Yorkers, some of whom

inner lives of other New Yorkers in settings ranging from Harlem to Park Avenue to lower Manhattan. He offers a brilliant, heart-rending description of several women meeting in a support group for mothers who have lost one or more sons in Vietnam. In other sections he conveys the perspectives of a young man who photographs subway graffiti, a hacker connecting to New York by means of a phone and computer link, two drug-addicted painters who crash into Corrigan's life, a mother and daughter caught up in prostitution, and a municipal judge who harbors a secret grief. "Every now and then the city shook its soul out," McCann notes, and he is there to capture the sparks flying, the aura radiating.

Like Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, McCann's novel moves toward a conclusion that reveals unexpected, poignant connections among the characters. While Cunningham relied on Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*

as a textual template, McCann takes his inspiration from the Gospels,



Dante, James Joyce and Toni Morrison. His style ranges widely from taut narrative to lyrical lists in the style of Joyce. The result is a mesmerizing page-turner, but the rate of

turning is deliciously slow due to the density of human emotion and experience.

McCann's narrative coheres at a deep level by uncovering the humanity that unites individuals, particularly in experiences of bereavement and beauty. McCann has captured the deep connections among people even in an urban environment that on the surface might seem to be distancing and distracting. Clearly the fear the onlookers have about the man falling from his tightrope foreshadows the dread people will feel 27 years later as they look up at the same two towers collapsing in a terrorist attack. The man on the wire performed a balancing act no longer possible in the same way in a world now tipped into an age of terror. McCann's novel achieves its own brave act, finding a balance and connection among characters living in dizzyingly off-kilter times.

Corrigan "believed that the space for God was one of the last great fron-



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tiers,” and McCann has infused his novel with the sense that his characters perceive God’s presence in the good works, love and affection they experience. As one character states, in the midst of suffering and conflicted family and national histories “we have each other for the healing.” Like the tightrope walker, McCann successfully moves between the towering doubts and aspirations of his readers, encouraging them in their own seemingly impossible feats of faith and imagination.

The novel’s conclusion brings us far

forward in time from 1974 to 2006, after the twin towers have fallen. Although the prospect of further falls is never far away, the reader ends with a sense of having soared in the imagination. The novel’s title employs the syntax of Genesis (“Let there be light...”) to invite us to say along with McCann, “Let the great world spin,” affirming that in spite of pain and loss, the world truly is great.

GERALD T. COBB, S.J., is associate professor in the English department at Seattle University.

an epithet for the world, which is, of course, a moving house.

“December Roll Call” lists three “saints” in a row: “Merton, holy soul on fire./ Juan de la Cruz, in love with desire./ Mozart, martyred by music.” Here again, the avoidance of a triple rhyme is itself musical, a Haydnesque surprise. And then we have the folks who are perhaps not exactly saintly but who bear an iconic meaning, such as Hoss in the poem “My Bonanza,” based on the old television show “Bonanza.” Here, Hoss is the poet’s “bonanza,”

the big dumb ox-of-my-dreams.
Your brotherly touch sweet and
true
as the blue of your downcast
eyes
that said *you, you, you are the one.*

We take our saints, then, where we find them, hoping perhaps to find ourselves in them or, rather, embraced by them.

At the same time, the poet’s light self-mockery in “My Bonanza” renders her accessible, all the more human in her quest for emotional and spiritual freedom. O’Donnell sometimes literally *sings* her poems at readings: that strikes me as both suitable (to the poems) and fetching (for the audience weary of rhetoric).

Before her book reaches its end, the poems “move house” to New York, where O’Donnell now teaches at Fordham University. In “Amtrak #86” she and her family are

Heading North
where Vermeer’s blue girls
pour milk and weigh pearls,
his windows spilling Delft light
across the Met’s white walls,
where bluer skies arch high
across the space where the
Towers
trimmed and tacked
and, once, were felled by fire.

KELLY CHERRY

TOWARD A BRIGHTER PLACE

MOVING HOUSE Poems

By Angela Alaimo O’Donnell
Word Press. 98p \$18 (paperback)

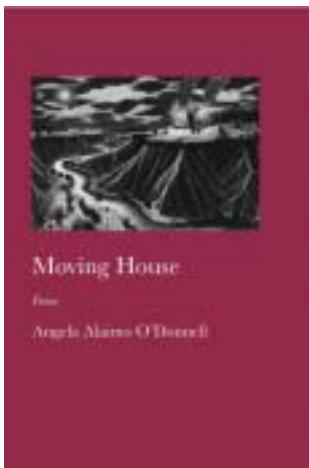
Angela O’Donnell has reviewed poetry and fiction in these pages and was a finalist for America’s Foley Prize in poetry. After two poetry chapbooks, this is her first full-length book of verse. *Moving House* is a deeply affecting book. It balances hard truths with a sweetness of spirit that is, if not singular, rare in our time, especially in contemporary poetry.

O’Donnell’s book begins in recollection of her childhood home in Pennsylvania mining territory, a place so grim and dark and claustrophobic that in her first poem she links it to the ancient tragedy-ridden House of Atreus and Edgar Allan Poe’s story “The Fall of the House of Usher.” In “Touring the Mine,” we learn about “the tight-lipped men/ our

fathers” who “split rock in the dark,” the author’s father among them. In “Looking Back” she writes touchingly, “we fled again—...refusing to be buried in that place/ as you, in your quiet grace, did not.” The soft off-center rhyme of “place” with “grace” is a mark of O’Donnell’s careful craft.

Grouping poems in seven sections, she leads us from this unspeakable (those men are *tight-lipped*) devastation and a poem, ironic and powerful, about “the crucified before Christ” (“The First Art”) through poetic songs celebrating saints of the

church and the saintliness of artists and the homelier saintliness of family, friends, neighbors and community to a less constricted realm in which possibility and autonomy play a salvific role. The book’s journey is indeed, as the title suggests, one of “moving house” from a dark to a brighter place—though one might also read the title as



But this is bravado, for the speaker sees that “my own moon face/ greets me ghostly in the glass” of the train window. She is still herself, plunging into a new environment but aware of real limitations. And in “Reading in the New House” she recognizes in a book about elephants the sisterly consciousness that crosses species to express a love of home, as if she were both elephant and free woman. As we do when we move houses, she both anticipates and laments.

In a brave poem in the last group, O'Donnell returns to the burning towers of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, finding in that holocaust an image of “stigmata,” arguing that God loves even “this world/ of fireball and

ash.” Yet these final poems, because they take in new breath, new lives, are buoyed by compassion to supply that splendid balance I mentioned above. Snowflakes in a snowfall are transfigured to “*Flecks of light from heaven./ Splinters of struck stars*” (italics hers).

In such snow and wind, “What mercy for the birds?” she asks. It is a profoundly distressing question, but readers will recognize that the poet who asks that question already feels within her a necessary mercy and will respond in kind.

KELLY CHERRY has just published *The Retreats of Thought: Poems* (Louisiana State Univ. Press) and *Girl in a Library: On Women Writers & The Writing Life* (BkMk Press).

ANNA NUSSBAUM KEATING

WORRY, DON'T BE HAPPY

BRIGHT-SIDED **How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America**

By Barbara Ehrenreich
Metropolitan Books. 256p \$23

When I asked the clerk at my local bookstore where I could find Barbara Ehrenreich's new book, he smiled. “I didn't know there was a downside to positive thinking,” he said.

As Ehrenreich points out, her new book is not about promoting pessimism. It takes aim less at our supposedly sunny national outlook (even though the most commonly prescribed drugs in the United States are antidepressants) and more at the various industries that have sprung up around the idea of positive thinking and are selling it back to us writ large.

Ehrenreich sees the stamp of positive thinking on the mortgage meltdown, the war in Iraq, even Hurricane Katrina. Maybe we were so busy looking at the

bright side of things that preventable dark realities caught us off guard.

In its 21st-century incarnation, positive thinking is more than counting your blessings. It is a program for self-improvement that requires one to monitor one's thoughts constantly and root out all negativity. We are not just told we should be positive; we are told we must be positive, that our physical, spiritual and emotional health depends on it, even when that means ignoring the facts, hiding our feelings and cutting “negative people” and depressing information from our lives. So much for that pesky two-year-old having a tantrum.

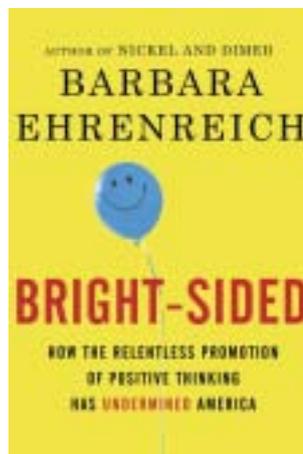
In a positive-thinking world, you do not go to funerals, you avoid suffering people and leave newspapers unread on the bedside table, because if you

don't think about it, it doesn't exist.

The author, whose previous best-sellers include *Nickel and Dimed*, begins her journey through the mysticism and pop psychology of positive thinking by describing her experience with breast cancer culture, in which chronically ill people are never allowed to be sad or angry; they are told that “staying positive” will help them get better, even though the science behind this claim is inconclusive at best. Still, the popular idea that negative thoughts manifest themselves as illness, endorsed by Oprah Winfrey herself, often means that the friends and family of cancer patients do not allow their loved ones to express any sadness, anger or fear. In the face of death they are told to “keep fighting.” If you cannot be introspective when you're sick or dying, when can you be? And what happens to all those forbidden thoughts?

“Positive thinking” began as a healing technique, which tried to correct the hard work and worry endemic to 19th-century American Calvinism with the pursuit of happiness. And yet, Ehrenreich argues, the positive-thinking gospel seems to have replaced constant worry over the state of one's soul with a new kind of obsession, the monitoring of one's thoughts in order to eliminate all negativity and achieve a capitalist's version of personal success.

Bright-Sided is at its best when mocking the ascendancy of the coaching industry in American business culture. Ehrenreich describes how the idea of the chief executive officer changed in the 1990s from a person who knew the most about the company and had worked his or her way up through its ranks to a charismatic celebrity motivator, who often knew little about the



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company and was simply called upon to be a "leader." In the 90s, corporations moved away from the "science of management" and began hiring consultants to lead exotic sounding positive-thinking workshops, vision quests, fire walking and tribal storytelling. Consultants repackaged Native American, Hindu and Buddhist mysticism in order to help motivate their employees to visualize greater productivity and sales. It is interesting that Catholic devotions were spared the positive-thinking treatment. Perhaps meditating on the sufferings of Christ would be too much of a downer.

Bright-Sided also lambastes prosperity gospel churches, where there are no crosses in the sanctuary and, as the Christian author and speaker Joyce Meyer says, "God is positive." The smiling preacher Joel Osteen instructs his church members from the pulpit to use positive thinking to procure everything from a better table at a restaurant to a closer parking space. He suggests visualizing one's ideal table in a crowded restaurant and saying, "Father, I thank you that I have favor with the hostess, and she is going to seat me soon." In this theology, there is no distinction between God's will and our will, and religious practice becomes all about us, or rather, all about me and not at all about God—or at least, not about the God of the New Testament, who exhorts us to "be satisfied with [our] wages."

Positive thinking assumes each person to be the center and creator of his or her own universe. It is not interested in the common good. Ehrenreich writes, "It is not clear that there are other people in the universe as imagined by the positive thinkers or, if there are, that they matter." In *The Secret*, Rhonda Byrne tells the story of a 10-year-old boy who was frustrated by long waits for rides at Disney World. This little boy had seen the movie "The Secret" and visualized being able to go in front of everyone

else in line. The next day he was chosen to be part of Disney's *First Family* and got moved to the front of every line. He's a *Secret* success story, but does it matter that he had a better day at the expense of the other children? Maybe not, but what if owning a bigger house means paying one's employees a non-living wage? Where do other people figure in, positively speaking?

The only weakness of *Bright-Sided* might be that Ehrenreich offers a pretty thin account of an alternative. She suggests her readers embrace reality, rather than delusion or sympathetic magic. But like the proponents of positive thinking, in the end she does not offer much of a reason for hope in anything substantial outside ourselves. She wants people to work together to solve social problems and promote justice, but what of real abiding joy?

ANNA NUSSBAUM KEATING *writes and teaches in South Bend, Ind.*

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LETTERS

Deacons as Co-Workers

Monsignor Rubino ("Fraternal Orders," 1/4) might consider adding a seventh suggestion as "advice for young clergy": View permanent deacons as brothers, co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord. There exists in our church in the United States an unhealthy tension between members of the presbyterate and diaconate communities. Fault can be found with both camps.

(DEACON) BARRY CROCE
Babylon, N.Y.

A Real Distinction

Pat Fosarelli's account of her medical and theological career was great ("Healing Faith," 1/18). Her distinction between the curing of disease and the healing of illness was most informative and comforting.

MARK GNERRO
Baltimore, Md.

Flexibility

Re "Dysfunctional" (Editorial, 2/15): I suspect *America* will want the filibuster back when the Republicans regain control of the Senate.

JOE KASH
Naperville, Ill.

Awaiting Change

Obama ran on a "change" platform. At the end of the day it is leadership that causes change to happen. Now we have Washington at its worst. Everyone is playing the blame game, including the president. Take a page out of the Clinton presidency. After congressional elections, he was wise enough to move to the center, because that was the only way to get things done. He was not perfect, but he accomplished a lot. Ditto for President Reagan. A leader is expected to get things done. President Obama is well liked, with good intentions. But his decision-making so far is wanting. It reflects a lack of senior

political experience, poor judgment or a far left viewpoint. The people want him to succeed and solve our country's problems. Let's pray he chooses a different strategy to do so.

MICHAEL J. BARBERI
Carlsbad, Calif.

A Volunteer Army Too

I was pleased to see your article "Supporting Lay Ministers" (2/1). Kyle T. Kramer makes strong arguments in support of quality formation and remuneration for all professional lay ecclesial ministers. I want to add to this a call for support of programs to train and form another category of lay pastoral leaders—those who give of themselves as volunteer leaders in our parishes. As director of the Diocese of Brooklyn's Pastoral Institute, I administer with my staff a three-year program that has trained close to 500 volunteer lay pastoral leaders since 2001. A 2009 survey of these found that 395 persons are currently actively engaged in parish ministry, most of them in more than one ministry.

We are thankful for these leaders, as well as the 240 people currently enrolled in the program, who have answered the call to ministerial leadership, and for the instructors, mentors, retreat leaders and ministry supervisors for them. We pray that many more will accept the challenge to be formed as lay church leaders for the 21st century and for the support of similar programs throughout the country.

GERALD TORTORELLA
Douglaston, N.Y.

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The Face of Freedom

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT (C), FEB. 28, 2010

Readings: Gn 15:5-18; Ps 27:1, 7-14; Phil 3:17-4:1; Lk 9:28-36

“While he was praying his face changed in appearance” (Lk 9:29)

A missionary friend working in a country where many forms of violence are a part of the fabric of everyday life remarked to me recently that she was very conscious that she can choose whether to stay or leave. This is a choice that the people to whom she has dedicated her life do not have. Some friends and family members do not understand how she could choose to put her own life in danger for the sake of the people she has come to love as her own.

Such a choice faces Jesus in today’s Gospel. In Luke’s version of this story, which we hear every year on the second Sunday of Lent, there are unique details that point to an earlier source that tells us more clearly what really happened at the transfiguration.

The episode is set at an important turning point in the Gospel. Jesus has been teaching, preaching, healing, exorcising demons and gathering disciples as he traverses Galilee. But soon he will “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51). Something happens on the mountaintop that helps Jesus to know what is his next step in his mission. Luke alone notes that when Jesus goes up the mountain with Peter, James and John, his purpose is to pray.

A clue to the nature of Jesus’ prayer

comes in the content of the conversation among Jesus, Moses and Elijah. They “spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.” Jesus is wrestling with the decision whether he should leave Galilee and direct his efforts toward Jerusalem, the center of religious and political power. There is still much to do in Galilee, and he could continue to minister there, but he struggles to know whether his efforts could bring about greater systemic change if he were to go to Jerusalem.

But Jesus is no fool. The handwriting is on the wall. Opposition to him is already mounting, and it would only intensify if he were to go to Jerusalem. As at every major turning point in the Gospel, Jesus enters into deep communion with God as he discerns what to do.

In this profound encounter with God, Jesus receives surety about his next steps, and this “aha” experience is visible on his face. Notably, Luke does not say that Jesus was transfigured; rather, that “his face changed in appearance.” Like Moses, whose face was radiant after being with God on Mount Sinai (Ex 34:29), and Hannah, whose face was lifted up after her prayer was heard (1 Sm 1:18), so Jesus’ encounter with God is written on his

face. He comes to understand that indeed, he is to go to Jerusalem and that he will be put to death there, but his death will not be the end of his life and mission. Rather, his exit from earthly life will bring the new liberation for God’s people. The Greek word *exodos* (9:31) literally means “exit,” connoting “death” (2 Pt 1:15), and also evokes the liberation of the Israelites from slavery.

During this intense prayer of discernment, Jesus is given sure signs that he is guided by God in his choice. A cloud, the sign of God’s presence with the Israelites as they went forth from Egypt, overshadows him as at his baptism. Two heavenly messengers embody the divine presence, giving Jesus strength as he leans on God’s word in the law



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- When have you been invited to risk your own comfort or security to serve the needs of others?
- Reflect on how difficult choices for love can be freeing.
- What does your face reveal about your relationship with God?

ART: TAD DUNNE

and the prophets. The heavenly voice reassures both him and his disciples of Jesus’ chosen status and the rightness of his choice. Thus assured of God’s love and direction, Jesus turns his transformed face toward Jerusalem.

Placing his own life in danger, Jesus makes a deliberate, prophetic choice to continue to “proclaim release to the captives” (4:18), as he had declared in his hometown synagogue. His death is not an inevitable fate but a choice for freeing love.

BARBARA E. REID

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.

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