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OF MANY THINGS

I failed my first pastoral challenge. The failure still weighs on me because the person involved was so close to me: my grandmother. Nellie—Carmella was her given name—was a short, stout lady crowned with a head of soft, tight white curls. She was sweet and kind and as well-beloved as she was widely esteemed for her home cooking. The eldest of 10 surviving children of an Italian-American family, she had gone to work at age 9, first in a handkerchief factory and later in a cigar factory; and then at 16 she married my grandfather.

Grandma also possessed a toughness that many working-class women had in the early 20th century. In the days before hospital emergency rooms, for example, she was the neighborhood surgeon, sewing up the neighbors' deeper cuts and gashes with needle and thread. One warm summer evening years later, Old Man Christian (that's what she called my father's father) brought home a tough old rooster in a burlap bag. It turned out no one at his boarding house had been able to slaughter it. He told them he knew a woman who would dispatch it; and so Grandma did, twisting off its head.

In social situations, I had never seen Grandma tough or prickly. But at one point in my seminary studies, some of her nephews, all of whom adored her, came to me and asked if I would intercede with her to reconcile with one of her younger sisters. The origin of their estrangement was obscure, but the distance and hurt were real. When I asked Grandma whether she would forgive the slight done her, she hesitated for a moment in a thoughtful, sad silence and then answered firmly, "No." I was nonplused. She had never said no to me before, and I regret to say that's where we left her nephews' request.

For some people, even considering forgiving is a nearly impossible task. They pour enormous psychic energy into resisting the thought. Many voices would rule out forgiveness even in church life. When Sister Camille D'Arienzo wrote of her ministry in victim-offender reconciliation two years ago in these pages ("The Witness of Courage and Forgiveness," 2/11/08), irate letters poured in protesting against encouraging victims to forgive their victimizers. Even Pope John Paul II met fierce opposition from cardinals and Curial officials when he undertook his ministry of apology and forgiveness.

We have a popular culture that thrives on nastiness, backstabbing and vengeance. Think of reality TV. The harshness of entertainment is not unlike our public life. In criminal and civil disputes, journalists, attorneys and advocacy groups work to keep victims' pain alive and in public view. Some victims become convinced they are entitled to stoke their rage forever. To be sure, as we have seen in the crisis that arose over sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy, the gay rights movement and the campaigns of the survivors of torture, it takes persistence and an outsized sense of offense to force others to see victims' pain, make amends and assure that justice is done. But when persistence grows insensitive and unsupple, it becomes obduracy. When rage overtakes our lives, it degenerates into blind fury. Where there is no place for forgiveness, the hard but lesser virtues necessary for protest become toxic for society.

Those who offend us may not be willing to apologize. They may fear the consequences of admitting fault. But if we do not forgive, we become locked in a poisonous past, and often others with us. A freely proffered act of forgiveness can free everyone. Similarly, a willing apology can open a new beginning for all concerned. Thinking back now on my lack of response to my grandmother's no, I wish I had asked her: "After a long life, what can two Christian women do but forgive each other?"

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.

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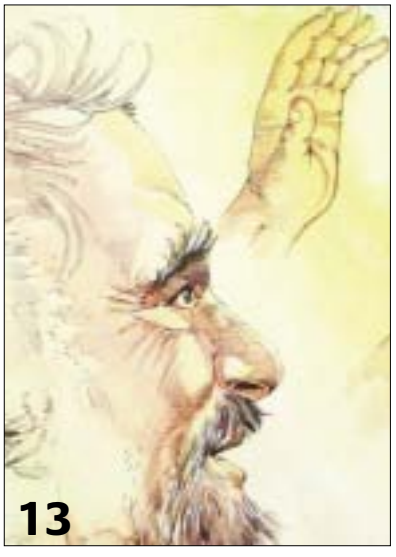

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ON THE WEB

Karen Sue Smith offers a video reflection on **James Tissot's paintings,** and Maurice Timothy Reidy reviews HBO's **"The Pacific."** Plus, **Richard Gaillardetz** speaks on Vatican II from the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress. All at americamagazine.org.

Achieving Step One

Hurrah! The yearlong battle has been won, and the health care reform bill is now the law of the land. Most Americans will benefit from the legislation: the insured who could get sick or lose their job; those with Medicare/Medicaid coverage whose drug payments fall into "the doughnut hole" gap in coverage; and especially the 32 million Americans currently without insurance. But this historic achievement is only the first step in what must be a change of attitude among the body politic. Americans must abandon the notion that health care is a luxury for the privileged and a "fringe benefit" from employers but just a wish for the unlucky rest of the population. The truth is that not only should every American have health coverage, but that most actually can have it—thanks to this bill. Our government has completed a major exercise in "promoting the general welfare," which the Constitution mandates it to do.

Part two of the required attitude shift will be more difficult to achieve. Having decided to provide nearly universal coverage, we Americans have to decide how to keep expensive health costs under control. The bill takes steps toward containing costs but does not go far enough. How the nation exercises fiscal responsibility matters. It ought not cut off some citizens' coverage just to rein in costs, any more than a family facing hard times would let two or three members go without food while the rest eat up. Major cost-cutting choices lie ahead. But only a real shift in attitude, one that seeks to promote the common good, will ensure that the right choices are made.

Strategic Divide

Before Vice President Biden's ill-fated visit to Israel last month, the handwriting was already on the wall. Anyone watching day-to-day events would not have been surprised that U.S. hopes of reopening the Mideast peace talks during Mr. Biden's visit would have been upended by the announcement of Israeli plans for the construction of 1,600 homes in Arab East Jerusalem. For many months the Israeli police have looked away as Jewish settlers expelled Arab residents and occupied their homes in East Jerusalem. Elsewhere on the West Bank the military has seized more land and demolished homes for expansion of Israel's security wall. Once-shared religious shrines have been declared Jewish heritage sites; nonviolent protests have been suppressed; and Israeli human rights activists have been harassed by police.

Had the United States chosen to listen, it did have a prophet interpreting events. In January, General David M. Petraeus, chief of the U.S. Central Command, which includes most of the Middle East and Central Asia, had warned the Joint Chiefs of Staff that Israeli policies and its obduracy in the peace process were harming U.S. strategic interests. As long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes unresolved, the general counseled, Arab and Muslim governments across the region will distrust U.S. initiatives there.

The rift between the United States and Israel that occurred after the Biden snub now goes far deeper than diplomatic niceties over the timing of an unhelpful announcement. It is a seismic clash of strategic visions. American commitment to the Israeli people may be strong, but the alliance between the two nations is pulling apart.

Move Over!

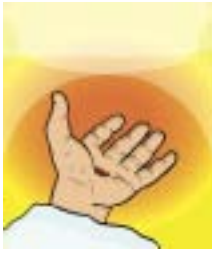
The multigenerational household, long in decline in the United States, is staging a comeback. The number of U.S. families living together that include seniors, working parents and their adult-ish children has hit a 50-year high. During the first year of the current recession, 2007 to 2008, the number of Americans living in such multigenerational households rose by 2.6 million to 49 million people—a little over 16 percent of the total U.S. population.

The Pew Research Center report suggests that this increase continues a trend that began in 1980. Pew attributes the rise of such households to immigrant families moving into the United States and bringing the custom with them, but it reports, on a slightly less positive note, that our foreclosure-spackled economy has also had much to do with the upturn in multigenerational homesteading. With jobs harder to find and marriages delayed five years later than in 1970, children are moving back in with their parents after college even as their grandparents crowd in when their health or incomes require more assistance.

Such arrangements mean less loneliness and better health for older Americans. One can only hope that for the younger generation, they mean a chance to acquire some wisdom from their elders and enjoy economic breathing room to save a little cash.

They are going to need it. An unrelated study reports that the percentage of U.S. workers with virtually no retirement savings grew for the third straight year. According to a survey from the Employee Benefit Research Institute, workers who reported that they have less than $10,000 in savings grew to 43 percent in 2010, and confidence in their ability to save enough for a comfortable retirement declined to 16 percent of respondents, the second lowest point in the survey's 20-year history.

Early in the Morning



Christ is risen!

Despite our best efforts as believers, it is often hard to see the glory for the gloom. For large numbers of unemployed in this country, hope may seem dim. Likewise, the people of Haiti, who have been suffering through an extended Good Friday, may well feel fated to disaster. For Catholics in Ireland and Germany, after revelations in recent weeks of sexual abuse of children there, signs of new life may likewise be hard to see.

But as the Easter Gospels relate, it took time too for Jesus' disciples to come to see the Easter light. In Luke's Gospel Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James visit the tomb of Jesus "at daybreak." According to John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene went alone "early in the morning, while it was still dark." Probably only the palest of dawns guided their feet, as they made their way to the tomb. The dimness of the light did not deter the women from rushing to devoutly tend to their Lord.

Often it is difficult for us, too, to see what lies ahead in our lives. The past is shrouded in darkness and the way ahead still heavy with shadows. When will a job come? Will it mean starting over in a new field, entail new training and relocation? After the spreading sexual abuse crisis, can we ever feel as confident that the church will be for us the spotless bride of Christ, an unsullied source of grace? Can the faithful continue to regard bishops as our pastors without their publicly taking responsibility for the failures of supervision that in many cases made the crisis much worse? In frustration and disillusionment, we strain to see; our vision is impaired.

For most of us, even for saints, puzzlement is entwined with faith. In Luke's Gospel the women peer into the tomb and are "puzzling over" what they see before an angel appears to clear things up. Later, when Peter and "the other disciple" reach the tomb, Peter also seems confused. Only the disciple whom Jesus loved "saw and believed." Our days, and often our Easters, are marked by a similar confusion and moments of unbelief. If the Easter proclamation "Christ is risen!" does not leave us completely unmoved, it leaves our hearts still longing to overflow with the joy we do not quite feel. Why can't we be like the disciple John, loving so much that we believe at the sight of the empty tomb? Why must we be like Peter, understanding so slowly and then impulsively moving from doubt to faith?

The disciples repeatedly misapprehend the risen Lord. Mary Magdalene mistakes him for the gardener; and on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, the disciples' "eyes were kept from recognizing him." In the Upper Room he appears like a ghost, suddenly and inexplicably standing in their midst. Resurrection exceeds our capacity to comprehend it. Like the disciples, even when confronted with vivid signs of new life, we sometimes fail to understand. Applying for jobs, we become frustrated. Confronted with yet another disaster, we find ourselves overcome with donor fatigue. The repeated narration of the sad facts of sexual abuse wears us down.

Yet even in the midst of dimness, confusion and misunderstanding, men and women of faith can glimpse signs of new life. Darkness, shadow and gloom need not come between us and the Lord. In his new book, *Made for Goodness,* Archbishop Desmond Tutu reminds us that "every act of kindness enhances the quality of life." There is good news in that the world has averted a depression and unemployment has begun to abate. It should be heartening, too, that after so many catastrophes, Haiti still engages the world's commitment. Undeterred by decades of failed experiments, the leading donor nations are undertaking together a long-term reconstruction program for that sorely tested Caribbean nation. Here at home a growing number of young people, even if they are not yet in church pews every Sunday, are doing the work of the church in service programs for the poor.

Some sunlight has even begun to pierce the mushroom cloud. The Obama administration has made elimination of nuclear weapons a long-term goal of American policy, and the Holy See's permanent observer to the United Nations has declared that "the conditions that prevailed during the cold war, which gave a basis for the church's limited toleration of nuclear weapons, no longer apply." He reiterated Pope Benedict XVI's call for "a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament."

Around us are signs of new life; we have only to see them to experience the glory of the risen Lord penetrating the shadows of our lives. If Haiti's earthquake survivors emerged from the rubble singing God's praises, how can we not chant "Alleluia!" for the signs of new life we encounter when we hear the Easter salutation, "Christ is risen!"?

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND ISSUES OF JUSTICE

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June 7-11, 2010

VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY

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Theories of Justice and the Common Good
Thomas W. Smith - Humanities

Catholic Social Thought and Ecology
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Service Learning: Scholarship for the Common Good
Noreen Cameron - Office of Service Learning

Catholic Social Thought and Human Work
Sally Scholz - Philosophy

Catholic Social Thought and the Morality of War and Peace
William Werpehowski - Center for Peace and Justice Education

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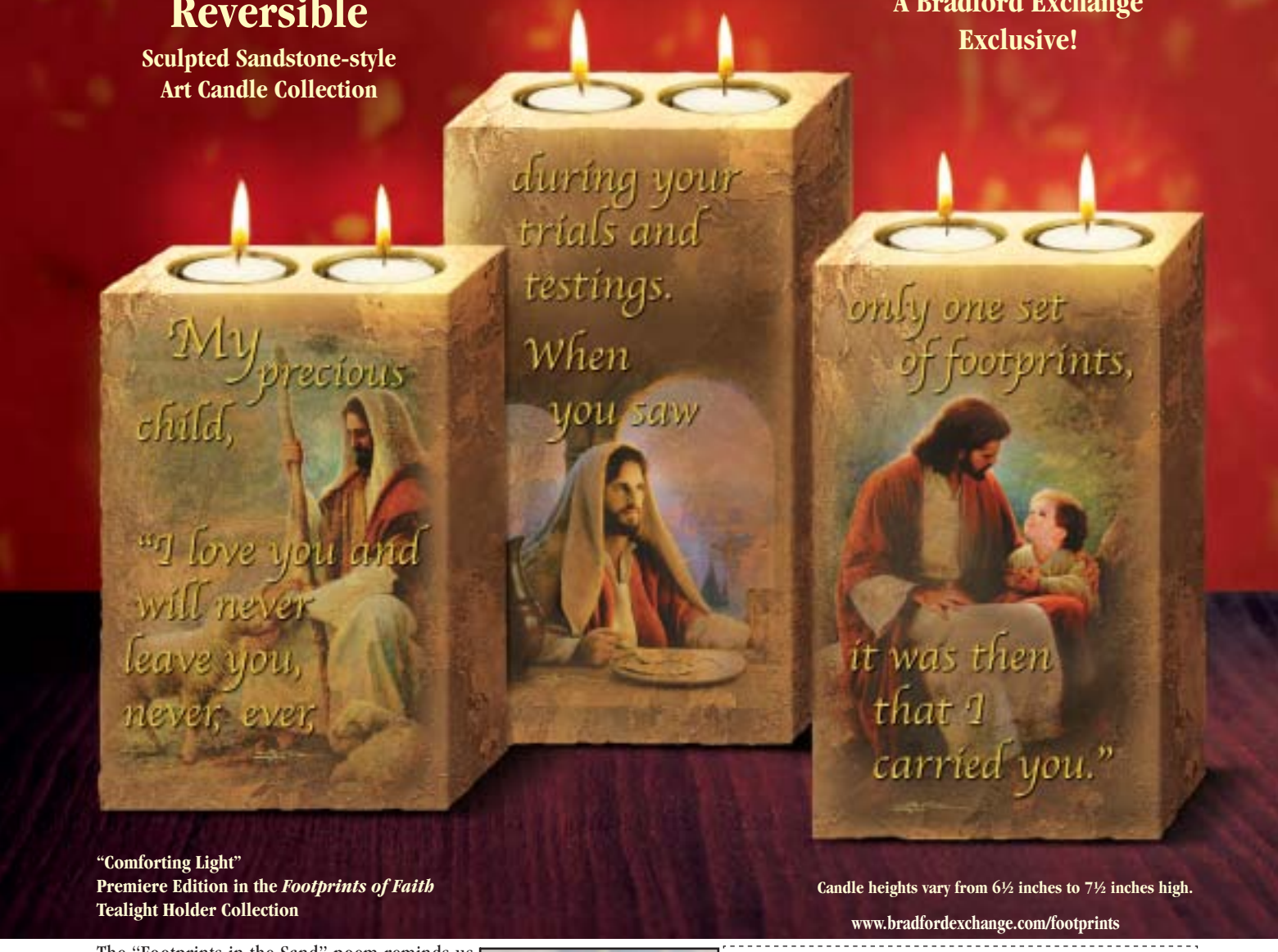

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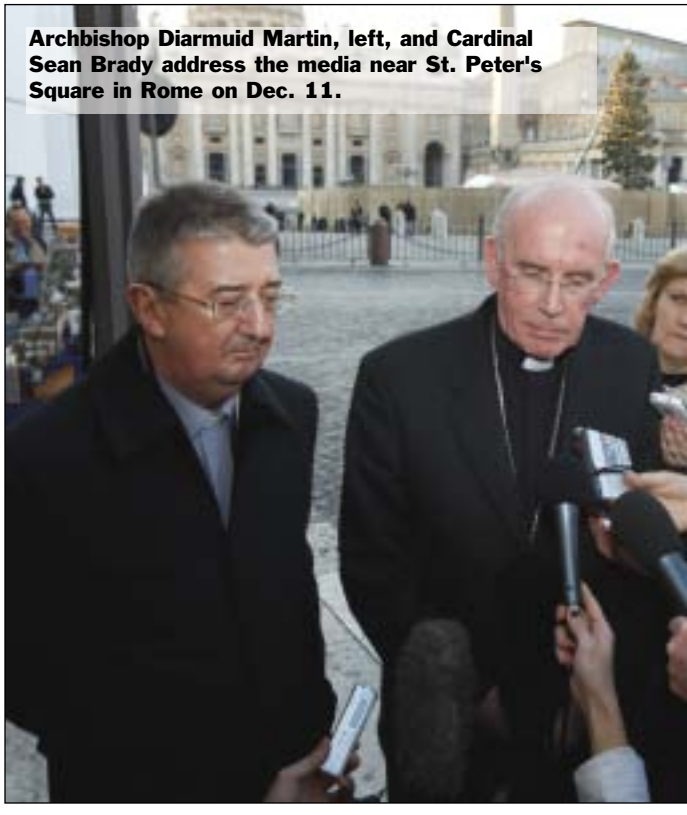
IRELAND

Archbishop Asks Accountability of Colleagues


Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, left, and Cardinal Sean Brady address the media near St. Peter's Square in Rome on Dec. 11.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin called on his episcopal colleagues to take responsibility for the Irish Catholic Church's failures in dealing with child sexual abuse by priests. "Without accountability for the past there will be no healing and no trust for the future," Archbishop Martin told reporters on March 20 following Mass at St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin after Pope Benedict XVI's pastoral letter to Irish Catholics on the abuse crisis was released.

Just a few days later, on March 24, the Vatican announced that the pope had accepted the resignation offered on March 9 by Bishop John Magee of Cloyne. Magee, 73, had served as personal secretary to three popes. He was accused in a 2009 investigation of mishandling reports of sexual abuse in his diocese. Four other Irish bishops had offered their resignations to the pope in December because of their mishandling of sexual abuse of children by clerics. The pope has accepted only one of these resignations.

Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland, has been under pressure to resign since he admitted on March 14 that he had been aware of allegations of abuse against a priest as early as 1975 and did not report them to police. Cardinal Brady has apologized, but he has resisted calls for his resignation.

Archbishop Martin described the pope's letter as "part of a strategy of renewal of the church." Many people "felt it was much stronger than expected," he said. Asked why the pope did not make any reference to a Vatican role in the crisis in Ireland, Archbishop Martin said the responsibility "very much" fell on the Irish church. "The Vatican had produced the norms of canon law and they weren't respected in the management of these cases," he said.

The pope's letter was read in full during Masses on March 20 and 21 in parishes across Ireland. Copies were snapped up quickly by parishioners.

During his homily on March 20, Archbishop Martin said: "The church tragically failed many of its children: it failed through abuse; it failed through not preventing abuse; it failed through covering up abuse." He said: "Child protection measures need to be constantly updated; more participation of lay men and women is needed to avoid a false culture of clericalism. We need to develop a fresh idea of what childhood means; we need to develop a strong horror of what childhood-lost means."

"We must face the truth of the past," the archbishop said, "repent it; make good the damage done. And yet we must move forward day by day along the painful path of renewal, knowing that it is only when our human misery encounters face-to-face the liberating mercy of God that our church will be truly restored and enriched."

Reaction from abuse victims to the papal letter was mixed. John Kelly of the Irish Survivors of Child Abuse said the letter represented a long-overdue apology from the pope. "We are fed up being victims and don't want to remain victims," Kelly said. "This letter is a possible step to closure, and we owe it to ourselves to study it and to give it a measured response."

But Maeve Lewis, the executive director of the victims group One in Four, said she was deeply disappointed by the letter "for passing up a glorious opportunity to address the core issue in the clerical sexual abuse scandal: the deliberate policy of the Catholic Church at the highest levels to protect sex offenders."

She said, "While we welcome the pope's direction that the church leadership cooperate with the civil authorities in relation to sexual abuse...we feel the letter falls far short of addressing the concerns of the victims."

From CNS and other sources.

HUMAN RIGHTS

U.S. Updates Reporting to Include Itself

With much of Washington focused on health care legislation, the annual release of the State Department's country reports on human rights practices received little attention this year, though the report helps shape U.S. policy approaches to the world.

Vulnerable populations affected by wars and internal conflicts in many places, including Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Congo and Sudan, were among the major concerns highlighted in the report's introduction and in remarks by Michael H. Posner, assistant secretary in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, at its release on March 11. "We live in a world of conflict," Posner said, with more than 30 wars and internal conflicts fueled by ethnic, racial and religious tensions, which disproportionately affect women, children, people with disabilities and refugees.

He singled out China, Iran, Nigeria and Cuba as countries with notably deteriorating human rights situations in 2009. Egypt, Russia and Sri Lanka were cited for what he called misuse of national security legislation to broadly curtail basic civil rights.

Other nations with generally good human rights records were flagged for enacting or considering official government policies that affect vulnerable groups. Posner included Uganda's proposed death penalty for homosexuals, discrimination against Muslims in various countries in Europe and sanctions against the Roma in Italy, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Posner gave credit to "positive trends" in Liberia, where a truth and reconciliation report and the prosecution of former President Charles Taylor are helping heal a country torn by a long civil war. He also noted Georgia's new criminal procedures, Ukraine's commission on anti-corruption, Bhutan's transition from absolute monarchy to constitutionally elected government and the first multiparty parliamentary election in the Maldives.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton promised the State Department would for the first time later this year present an internal report on how the United States measures up against the human rights standard to which it holds other countries. "Human rights are universal, but their experience is local," Clinton said at the press conference. "This is why we are committed to holding everyone to the same standard, including ourselves."

She said the United States would participate in the U.N. Human Rights Council's universal periodic review process. "In the fall, we will present a report, based on the input of citizens and N.G.O.'s, gathered online and in face-to-face meetings across the country attended by senior government officials," Clinton said.

One issue that the review may touch on is the continued use of the death penalty in the United States, a concern raised by the United Kingdom in its own annual international human rights report on March 17.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, pictured here at a recent press conference with former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, promises to hold the United States to high standards on human rights—its own.

Nuclear Strategy Deters Disarmament

Nuclear deterrence, the idea that possessing nuclear weapons discourages enemy attack, is preventing the goal of disarmament from being achieved, said the papal nuncio to the United Nations. Archbishop Celestino Migliore told an audience hosted by the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University on March 16 that cold war conditions that encouraged the church's "limited toleration of nuclear deterrence" no longer exist. Other panelists at the forum said that religion can play an important role in achieving the eventual goal of dismantling all nuclear weapons and called for new international treaties that specify the depth of weapons cuts, especially between the nuclear superpowers, the United States and Russia.

Latinos More Secular, Not Protestant

A new analysis of religious identification finds that contrary to popular and scholarly belief, U.S. Latinos are not leaving the Catholic Church for Protestant churches but are becoming more secularized, affiliating with no faith at all. A study released March 16 by the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., reported that Latinos who have left the church since 1990 have shifted toward secularism as they become more Americanized. The study noted that as in the general U.S. population, Latinos became less identified with Christianity between 1990 and 2008, down from 91 percent to 82 percent. Those who said they identified with no faith grew to 12 percent in 2008 from 6 percent in 1990. The American Religious Identification Survey of 2008 reports that Latino immigrants continue to be the largest factor in maintaining the size of the U.S. Catholic population. Latinos comprised 32 percent of all U.S. Catholics in 2008 compared with 20 percent in 1990. Among Latinos, 60 percent in 2008 said they were Catholic, compared with 66 percent in 1990.

Haitian N.G.O.'s Seek Reconstruction Role

More than 26 Haitian nongovernmental organizations have condemned international talks about the future of their earthquake-shattered nation, saying they have been excluded from the discussions and that their calls for a new model of development in Haiti are being ignored. Officials from a range of international organizations met in the Dominican Republic on March 16-17 to discuss plans for Haiti's reconstruction before a donors' conference in New York scheduled for March 31. The Haitian groups said, "The ongoing process has been characterized by an almost total exclusion of Haitian social actors themselves and scant and disorganized participation of representatives from the Haitian state." The statement continued, "The path set out for Haiti's reconstruction…cannot respond to the expectations of the Haitian people as it has not been conceived to stimulate development, but simply for 'restoration,' even though the Haitian context demands a complete rethink of the development model."

NEWS BRIEFS

March for America

More than 200,000 people gathered on March 21 at the National Mall in Washington, D.C., heard **Cardinal Roger Mahony** of Los Angeles address the March for America supporting comprehensive immigration reform. ✦ **Byron Lima Estrada**, a retired army colonel convicted in the 1998 killing of Auxiliary Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedera of Guatemala City was paroled on March 16. ✦ **Chiara Luce Badano**, an Italian member of Focolare who died of bone cancer just before her 19th birthday in 1990, will be beatified on Sept. 25 at a shrine outside Rome. ✦ A High Court decision in London on March 17 exempted a **Catholic adoption agency** from having to accept same-sex and cohabiting couples who present themselves as prospective parents. ✦ At the request of the bishops of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Vatican has established an international commission to study alleged Marian apparitions at **Medjugorje** in Bosnia. ✦ Pope Benedict XVI will preside at the beatification ceremony of Cardinal **John Henry Newman** in Coventry, England, during a four-day visit to the United Kingdom from Sept. 16 to 19.

MARGARET SILF

One Step at a Time

Stories of the great human migrations have always fascinated me. In my imagination I have pictured these migrations as mighty epic adventures in which groups of eager and daring explorers ventured on long journeys into the unknown, risking everything to discover what lay beyond the horizon.

When I began to read more widely about human evolution, I realized my mistake. I even remember the phrase that changed my perceptions. The writer had mentioned, almost in passing, how overcrowding would have led a few families to move on a bit farther in search of more space to live, a phenomenon he described as simply "moving a few yards farther along the beach." Over the millennia, of course, these few yards became migration patterns that would extend across half the globe. This was not about heroic journeys at all but about simply moving on, one yard at a time.

And that might have been the end of it, had a Lenten reflection I heard recently not brought back my migratory thoughts. The speaker happened to comment on what she called "the fall from temptation into action," a fall that Jesus, of course, conspicuously resisted. And this in turn reminded me of something else I had heard from a young man, who appeared in every way to be loving, caring and gentle, but felt moved suddenly to hold forth on how humanity had fallen catastrophically into what he called "utter depravity." I don't believe that I am the only Christian who has difficulty getting my head around this claim in a world in which I also see so much goodness.

While I find it hard to buy into the depravity theory—especially when I look at innocent infants who have yet to make a conscious choice at all, let alone a depraved one—I can very easily identify with the homilist's observation of how disastrously easy it is to fall that one small step, from temptation into action.

Jesus must surely have had this in mind when he warned his followers that an underlying attitude of seething resentment or unjustified anger can lead that one step too far, from the temptation to destroy another person into the act of murder, or how a lustful fantasy can all too easily lead to infidelity, seduction or rape.

> If we can fall so easily through one little choice, what about the rising?

One small step! Falling isn't just the big event in the Garden of Eden, but the multitude of much smaller events that happen moment by moment in ordinary human lives. We can do something about these. We can notice the subtle inner movements that might be pushing us closer to dangerous edges and work against them. It is only possible through grace, of course, but at least the challenge now becomes human-sized.

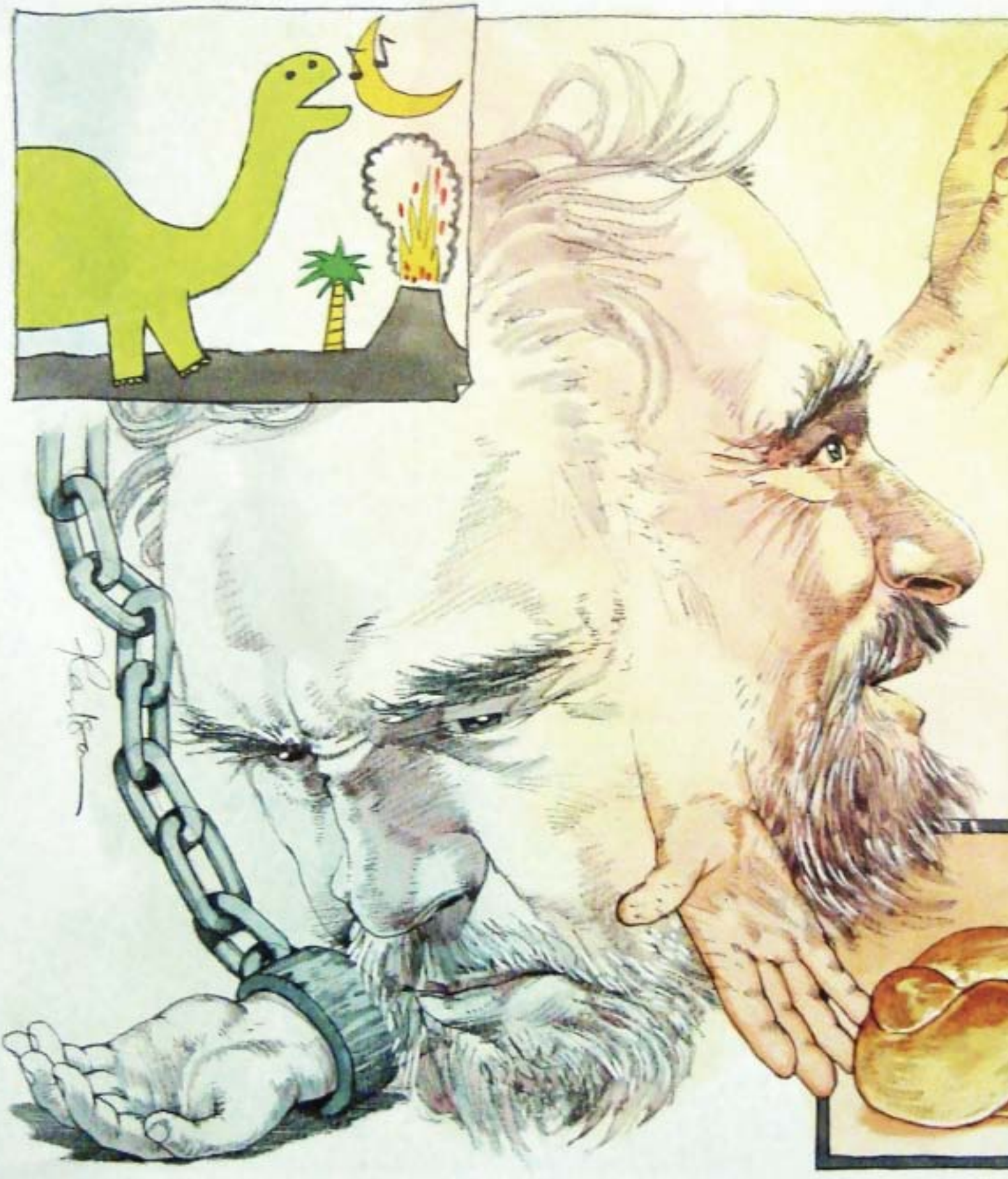
But if we can fall so easily, one step at a time, through one little choice, what about the rising?

While I was halfway through writing this column my computer's operating system chose, without warning, to install updates. In an instant, my freshly written column faded into oblivion, and my computer powered down while my uninvited updates were processed. And whose fault was that? No prizes for guessing I had neglected to press "save"! My first instinct was to call the software providers to complain about their unwanted, mid-morning updates. I resisted the urge to turn my temptation into action (more through laziness than virtue, it has to be said), made myself a cup of tea and reflected instead on what I could learn from the experience. Now, on this second attempt, I have saved after every second sentence.

I think rising is a bit like that. Of course, in this joyous season, we celebrate the great transcendence in Jesus of life over death. But we are also invited to participate in resurrection in our own lives, moment by moment, choice by choice. We will meet those inner movements of temptation every day, and they have the power to drag us down into the worst that we can be. But the save button is always there. We activate it whenever we ask ourselves: In this situation, will I follow my temptations and fall a step further away from the best I can be, or will I turn my eyes toward the light of Christ in my heart and choose, instead, to rise with him, a little bit closer to all that God believes I can become?

On the human scale, falling, like rising, happens one small step at a time. A few small steps in one lifetime make for great movements in the story of humanity.

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



A REFLECTION ON THE MEANING OF EASTER

Something Wondrous Is Afoot

BY KATHLEEN NORRIS

Many years ago I received a passionate love letter written on a scrap of paper three inches square. It was placed in my jacket pocket by a 6-year-old boy as I strolled through his classroom encouraging him and the other children as they wrote and illustrated poems. I had no idea he had put it there until much later that day. His attempt at anonymity was futile; I had noticed him bent over something small, working with such intense concentration that I didn't dare to intrude. This boy was terribly shy and had blushed deeply the day before, when I praised a drawing he had made of a brontosaurus, with its yearning neck fully extended, singing a song to the moon.

As for the content of his note, it moved me deeply, bringing tears to my eyes and also joy and wonderment. Border to border, he had filled that paper with scribbles, tiny wiggly lines, etched deeply onto the page. Much effort had gone into it, and the result was all heartfelt, inexpressible love.

What this has to do with Easter, I am not sure. But I will try to explore and explain. That little boy, his teacher told me, was not a particularly good student, though he tried hard. He was not accustomed to being told he had done something well. And now, courtesy of the North Dakota Arts Council and its Artists in Schools program, change was afoot. The teacher said she hoped this program would give her something to build on to make this child's school experience less painful.

ART: FREDERICK H. CARLSON. WWW.CARLSONSTUDIO.COM

KATHLEEN NORRIS *is the author of several acclaimed books on spirituality. Her latest book,* Acedia and Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life, *is now available in paperback.*

On the way to becoming Christian, we are all learners. When it comes to fully accepting what it means to be a Christian, I am not a particularly good student. For one thing, my prayer life is much too haphazard for a Benedictine oblate. If I am fortunate enough to be visiting a monastery, going to the Liturgy of the Hours every day, I do fine; but left to my own devices I falter. I know very well that church is the right place for me to be on Sunday morning, but I don't always make it. I am inspired by the many people I know who practice their faith with great compassion and fervor, ministering to others with an impressive reliability that I lack. I am convinced that God loves us all.

Telling the Stories

I am sometimes told by readers that my books have ministered to them, and that is welcome news. Many of my letters from readers contain eloquent expressions of gratitude. After *The Cloister Walk* appeared (a book about my experience of Benedictines and their observance of the liturgical year), a man whose wife was in the last stages of lung cancer wrote to tell me that he was reading the book to her and that they were both finding solace in it. I am glad to hear such things, but I know that I could not have written the book with such a goal in mind. All I can do is tell my stories as best I can, and let a book find its own way in the world. It is grace that does the rest.

The experience of touring to promote *The Cloister Walk* gave me a new appreciation of the Easter season. A book tour is hard-core business travel and can be sheer drudgery; I once visited 17 cities in 21 days. But it also provides me with a welcome opportunity to meet booksellers and readers. In the 1990s I always toured in the spring, between Easter and Pentecost, and one passage from the book that seemed appropriate to share with my audiences was about visiting an elderly Benedictine who had been hospitalized after a fall. He was badly bruised, with his pain muted but not fully extinguished. Upon seeing his visitors, myself and a fellow monk, he exclaimed in a weak voice, "Ah, it's a sweet life."

Because of his injuries, he would soon move to the monastery nursing home and have to give up his long-term ministry at a local prison. But two people had come to visit him, which made life pure sweetness. The old man was hospitality incarnate, and his radiance reminded me of a story from the "Dialogues" of St. Gregory the Great. St. Benedict had gone to great lengths to become a hermit, but one day a visitor arrives. He explains that because it is Easter, he has brought a gift of food. Benedict replies, "I know that it is Easter, for I have been granted the blessing of seeing you."

Being able to say that to audiences made Easter come alive for me. These strangers had indeed become a blessing

for my tired eyes. I was especially thankful because I find Easter difficult to talk about. Slogans like, "We're Easter people," too easily degenerate into Christian jargon that drives doubters and strugglers away. In this suffering world of failed states, failed relationships and natural disasters exacerbated by human greed, it makes a lot more sense to say, "Jesus wept" than "He is risen." But making sense is often overrated. And when it comes to the Resurrection, I have nothing to prove. My late husband convinced me that outside the ether-laced realms of higher mathematics, not much can be proven anyway. If sense and proof were all life had to offer, who would want it?

From Death to Life

As a writer and as a Christian, I find that my basic task is translating what seems abstract or otherworldly into something that people can grasp and that resonates with their experience. Talking about Easter might mean asking people if they have ever felt dead inside, with their lives stripped of meaning. Maybe they were wrapped in the grave clothes of drug addiction or depression. What was it that brought them back to themselves, to a renewed sense of purpose and freedom?

The writers of the early church are generally of more use to me than modern theologians when I am trying to make theological concepts come alive. John Chrysostom, for example, packs his dogma into plain speech and concrete imagery. A human voice comes through. The homily he preached in Constantinople before being forced into an exile from which he would never return is fortified with biblical allusion and still heart-rending more than 1,600 years later: "Christ is with me, whom shall I fear? Though waves rise up against me, the seas, the wrath of rulers: These things are no more to me than a cobweb." He encourages the congregation not to lose hope because: "Where I am, there also are you; where you are, there too am I; we are one body.... We are separated by space, but we are united by love. Not even death can cut us apart. For even if my body dies, my soul will live on and will remember my people."

To me, this is Easter truth speaking through ordinary language. To someone else, it might seem the ravings of a fool. For we are always free to choose what meaning to give to the events that shape us, to opt for fear or hope, despair or joy, bitterness or love.

ON THE WEB
From the archives, an Easter reflection by John W. Donohue, S.J.
americamagazine.org/pages

Two men I knew both received a dire prognosis, one of liver cancer, the other of stage IV melanoma. The man with liver cancer, a tavern owner and petty criminal, survived much longer than anyone expected; he had several years of

remission. He told me that on his worst days in the hospital he promised himself that if he ever got out again, he would devote himself to "looking out for number one." And that is exactly what he did; living selfishly and self-indulgently until the day he died, alone and mostly unlamented.

The other man was a Benedictine monk who died just three months after his initial diagnosis. "I realized," he wrote to friends, "that everything I've experienced since my original bout with melanoma 20 years ago has been a grace...not a bad realization for a monk. I have never felt so surrounded by love. This is the most grace-filled time in my life, an unending source of hope and well-being at the core of my being—pure gift." In thanking the many who had been praying for him, he wrote: "Thanks for helping me to choose life in this time of fear and uncertainty. Something wondrous is afoot. I just can't see it yet."

A man named Paul, facing execution, once wrote from a jail cell: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (Phil 4:4). A man named Jesus, on the night before he died, ate his last meal with friends, talked up a storm and no doubt startled the company by proclaiming, "I am saying these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (Jn 15:11). Wondrous things afoot: an inexpressible but ever-present love, a joy so profound that even death cannot diminish it. Happy Easter! A

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Judgment Day

Bertrand Russell enters the pearly gates.

BY BERNARD J. VERKAMP

On April 1, 1970, the English atheist Bertrand Russell shuffled through the pearly gates into the presence of the God whose existence he had spent a lifetime denying. Most of history's greatest thinkers were clustered here and there around the heavenly court, just as Raphael had pictured them, carrying on the eternal *dialektike* about what is really real. Spotting the arrival of his onetime Cambridge fellow, Ludwig Wittgenstein broke off the conversation he had been having with Iris Murdoch and shouted to his colleagues, "It's Bertie!" All fell silent and turned to watch as the 97-year-old philosopher approached the divine throne, fully expecting that he would finally humble himself and admit to having been wrong about what he now saw to be the truth. But it did not happen. When challenged by the Godhead to explain why he had played the fool for so long, Russell simply retorted, "You didn't give us enough evidence!"

"Touché!" Voltaire shouted from the circle of onetime agnostics he had been regaling all morning with witty aphorisms. Still smarting from the centuries-long probation he had been made to endure in the company of Jeremy Bentham and other atheistic piranha still in purgatory, he welcomed the chance to prick the divine ego for having made it so difficult to find any sign of transcendence in human history.

"And what kind of evidence might have been enough?" the Godhead asked, trying to humor what he knew to be the

BERNARD J. VERKAMP, *a professor of philosophy at Vincennes University in Indiana, is the author of the* Encyclopedia of Philosophers on Religion *(McFarland, 2008).*

ART: RICK PARKER

Cambridge scholar's rather simplistic, scientistic mind-set.

"Well, a little order in your universe might have helped," Russell barked. "Dropping us humans onto such a desolate, wobbly and generally uninhabitable block of atoms didn't do much for your reputation as an Intelligent Designer!"

"So, what would you have wanted me to do, construct a perfectly predictable world and refrain, as Albert Einstein claimed I had, from rolling the dice? I would've thought you'd have had a keener appreciation for a little chaos and chance-play in the world about you!"

Out the corner of his eye, Russell caught a glimpse of Augustine winking to Thomas Aquinas. Grinning sheepishly, the Cambridge don continued: "Well, it's nice to know you enjoyed gambling, but you hadn't forgotten, had you, that a lot of human lives were at stake? For all that we mere mortals could tell, whatever game you were playing was doomed to failure from the start, and we'd all find ourselves in a cemetery of dead stars. Might not a few better clues from you about where your imagination was taking us have helped stem such a tide of pessimism?"

"I tried. Ever read that book I wrote about how my son was sent to draw the whole of the universe back up into the glory of his own resurrected body?"

"Yeah, I read it," Russell replied. "First as a kid and then once again, years later when I already had one foot in the grave. But I could not make any more sense of it the second time than I had the first. It did not seem to match any evidence I had come across in my years of scientific research and philosophical speculation."

"That, my dear professor, may have been your problem! Had you put your scientific instruments aside for a moment and, instead of gawking and thinking so much, tried to catch an intuitive glimpse of my evolving universe from the inside out, you might not have missed so much of the evidence that was there for all to see or hear."

"I was a scientist and a logician, not a poet! What did you expect?" Russell protested.

"Pythagoras was a scientist, and he didn't have trouble hearing the music of the spheres! Nor did Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who appreciated empirical observation but complained about the 'hollowness of scientific abstractions' and posited a 'poetic world' that could not be 'verified' by scientific reasoning."

Upon hearing the Godhead refer to one of their own kind, a cheer went up from a crowd of Romantic thinkers congregated nearby around the mellifluous Goethe. He had been lecturing them on how the "delicate empiricism" of a "spiritualized science" investigates "that which can be investigated," but "quietly reveres that which cannot be investigated."

"Did you hear that?" the Godhead asked Russell. "Wasn't that what your friend Ludwig also had in mind when he

warned you that the existence of the universe is not so much a 'brute fact' as it is an imponderable 'mystery' that must be 'passed over in silence'?"

"Probably so. All that brilliant gray matter of his seemed to turn to mush in the end."

Wittgenstein, just starting to take a harp lesson from one of the angels, overheard the slur from his onetime mentor, but showed no sign of pique.

"I guess you thought my apostle Paul had gone mad, too, when he started waxing poetic about the difference between material and spiritual bodies?" said the Godhead.

'Well, a little order in your universe might have helped,' Russell barked.

"You got that right! All that mumbling about 'star differing from star'! Democritus was more to my taste."

"Is that why you embraced the Epicurean way of life?" the Godhead inquired, while feigning an accusatory grimace.

"I took my pleasures," Russell conceded, "but I wasn't on an ego-trip, if that's what you're implying."

"Lighten up, Bertrand! I was just joshing. You wouldn't be here today if I hadn't taken some notice of all the good work you did fighting for nuclear disarmament and other pacifist goals."

"Trust you also noticed my efforts to help people find meaning in their lives by engaging themselves in projects bigger than their own egos?"

"I did, and I would have given you much more credit for it had you not always insisted upon uncoupling such altruistic behavior from any worshiping of me."

"Thought you had long since died and that it was time to get along without you."

"Fair enough, if you were only thinking of yourself; but did you need to share such bad news with the masses?"

"Nietzsche thought so!" Russell exclaimed. "As did Sigmund Freud and his followers, all of whom thought it was time to stop offering their fellow humans false consolation."

"Well, my blessing on them! I know they meant well. But did it never dawn on any of you that, as my good servants Carl Jung and Unamuno frequently pointed out, there are a lot of people in the world who cannot cope with a reality unbuffered by their trust in me as their provident father?"

"So, we should have left them wallowing in their wishful thinking?"

"Bertie, my boy, you forget that I'm actually here. Freud was half-blind. But yes, even if I were but a figment of their imagination, you would have done the masses much better had you left them secure in their beliefs. Nietzsche did them no favor and, inadvertently, probably inclined many of his fellow countrymen to sell their souls to the Nazi thugs who butchered my chosen people."

"You blame Nietzsche for that? What about all those Christians and other religious people in Germany, and around the world, who did nothing to help the Jews escape the tyranny of Hitler? What about the pope? Did his or their belief in you make them any more compassionate? And what about yourself? Where were you when your supposedly chosen people needed you most? Can you blame them now, after Auschwitz, for chiming in with Nietzsche's declaration of your death? And speaking of Nietzsche, where is he? Is he here yet?"

"Not yet," the Godhead replied ruefully. "He's been a hard nut to crack."

"Where were you when your people needed you most?"

"I was there, in Auschwitz, Buchenwald and every one of those horrible death camps. And I dare say, contrary to Rabbi Rubenstein's understandable disbelief, many Jews did find in their conviction of my presence the strength to die with dignity and, in the tradition of all my suffering servants, gave up their lives as sacrificial lambs for the rest of

mankind. Look around you and you'll see many of them now basking in their glory. Just as I had gone down into Egypt with their father Jacob and brought him back up, so I went down with them and have now brought them up to their eternal reward."

"Could you not have spared them all that suffering in the first place by keeping your creatures under better control?" Russell pressed. "How can you claim to be the lord of history when the forces of evil always seem to have the last word? That book you wrote says you actually hardened the Pharaoh's heart. Did you harden Hitler's heart too? And what about Caligula, Genghis Khan, Stalin, Pol Pot and the other tyrants who have terrorized their human subjects? Were they merely instruments of your divine wrath, and if so, how were we supposed to believe that you are a God of love?"

"What they did, they did by their own choice. I set all my human creatures free and gave everyone grace enough to overcome their brutish instincts. It has surprised and disappointed me, too, that so many of them have relapsed into their jungle pasts. My heart goes out to their victims. But I would have to say I am pleased so far with the outcome."

"That's easy for you to say, sitting up here on high, far removed from the daily vicissitudes of human affairs. Spend a day or two in old Calcutta, Istanbul or Mexico City and you might wish for another universal flood."

"Have you forgotten? I did come down. Kenosis is my middle name. Remember how they crucified my son? Remember his heart-rending cry of despair from the cross? How better could I have answered you rebels? What more could I have done to acquit myself of the evil you impute to me?"

"Did you have to take the children with you?"

"What children?"

"Those your church likes to call the Holy Innocents? Wasn't Dostoyevsky's character, Ivan Karamazov, justified in putting you on trial for conditioning the arrival of your son on such a loss of innocent lives?"

"That was not my doing; the birth of my son was an act of unconditional love. That King Herod's inability to tolerate my presence drove him into such a savage frenzy of killing was no fault of mine or of my son. Read my book again and you'll see that Jesus loved children and warned that anyone abusing them would be better off being thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck."

"You might want to remind your clergy of that."

"I will—and not only them, but your fellow professors as well."

"So, may I stay?"

"Without a doubt!"

"What does that mean?"

"Go figure." A

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ART | KAREN SUE SMITH

THE ARTIST AS BELIEVER

James Tissot's visionary paintings of Jesus

Although religious conversion always bears fruit in a person's life, that fruit is sometimes not visible to the casual observer. In the case of the French artist James Tissot (1836-1902), however, the evidence of his conversion 125 years ago is still plain for all to see.

According to his own account, Tissot, at around age 48, saw a vision during Mass in the Church of St. Sulpice in Paris. Until that time his paintings had focused primarily on high-society life in Paris and London. After his mystical experience, Tissot's work changed markedly. His next painting, "Inward Voices," depicts his vision: an impoverished couple sit on the rubble of a building in ruins; beside them sits Jesus—scourged, bleeding and wearing a crown of thorns, yet present to comfort them. Tissot's religious experience at St. Sulpice resulted in a lifelong directional shift in his artistic work.

Like most conversions, Tissot's was not instantaneous. Even before his conversion, he had painted several religious subjects that show his familiarity with the Christian saints. Around 1881, Tissot finished a series of oils and etchings of the parable of the prodigal son, setting each episode in the France of his day. The rich father lives in a chic riverside home; the prodigal spends his inheritance on an Asian fling (Paris was infatuated with Japanese culture at the time); the father and son reconcile on a crowded dock; and the celebratory family feast is served waterside, perhaps along the Seine.

Four years later, after his vision, Tissot undertook an artistic project that led him to study archeology and the Bible, and he traveled three times to the Middle East, where he filled sketchbooks with images of the people and places he observed. Drawing upon his photos, sketches and nearly 100 finished drawings, Tissot created a suite of 350 watercolors, entitled "The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ," commonly known as "The Life of Christ," a chronology from Jesus' birth to the Ascension. It took the artist 10 years to make these vivid, detailed and emotive images. Some are miniature mas-

"THE PROCESSION IN THE STREETS OF JERUSALEM," BY JAMES TISSOT. PHOTO: BROOKLYN MUSEUM

terpieces; only the major episodes in Jesus' life are larger in size than a standard sheet of paper. The narrative work includes portraits and landscapes, aerial views and close-ups, intimate moments and vast crowd scenes.

Contemporaries of Tissot, like Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh, also produced biblical images, as did Maurice Denis decades later. But by the end of the first half of the 20th century, only Georges Rouault and Marc Chagall had come even close to Tissot in the quantity of their Bible-based output.

"THE SOWER," BY JAMES TISSOT. PHOTO: BROOKLYN MUSEUM

Tissot was bound by the beliefs of his time. His is a single, harmonized Gospel story, untroubled by the questions that modern biblical scholarship has raised and the contradictions it has pointed out. Mistakenly, he thought the culture of the Middle East had not changed much since the time of Jesus and so worked diligently to capture the similarity on paper before modernity could erase it. But this "mistake" accounts for some of the admirable documentary detail of his work: the patterns of rugs, tiles, lattices, textiles, capitals and costumes; and the precise rituals and pageantry, including the segregated society of men and women. Jesus walks through narrow passageways; sits in dark, moonlit rooms; strides down stone streets; and when not on the sea, traverses a pink, gold or blue landscape with oases of palms and olive trees that is starkly beautiful—its rock piles casting gray and mauve shadows. At times one also sees the Jerusalem of Tissot's day—its red-and-white striped buildings bleached white in the gleaming sun.

Tissot's people are dynamic and lifelike. In "Procession in the Streets of Jerusalem" (p. 25), young boys in sidelocks sing and clap their hands as Jesus triumphantly enters the city by donkey. One of these young boys appears in an ominous scene just a few days later when Jesus, now a prisoner, is led from Caiaphas to Pilate. Tissot's cast of characters extends beyond the leading roles to include townspeople whom viewers can recognize throughout the series.

The way Tissot presents Jesus, however, is often disappointing, especially in comparison with Rouault's powerful images. At times Tissot's Jesus appears as an expressionless, pale, blond man in a sea of energetic, gesturing, swarthy Jews. Some of this has to do with the small scale, where

Jesus' white robe and blond hair and beard become a cliché.

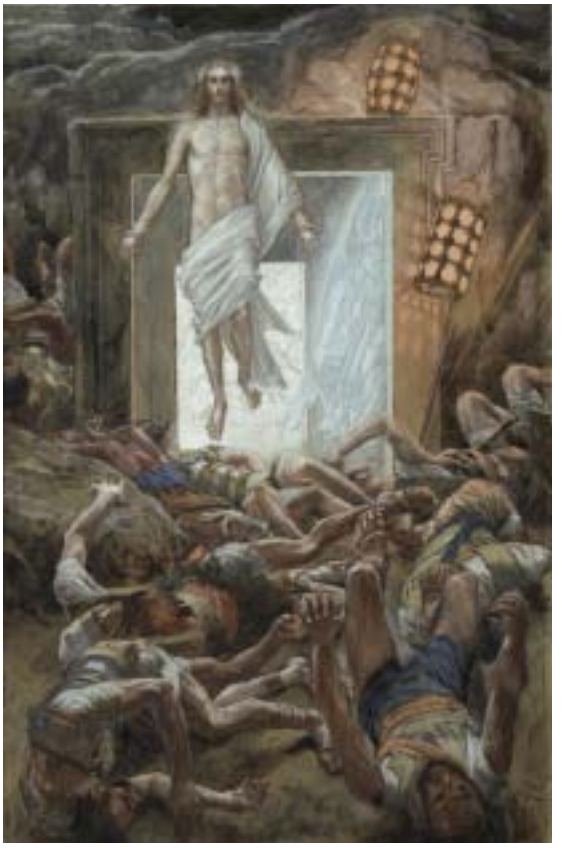
Fortunately, there are exceptions. "The Good Shepherd" Jesus, for example, his head covered, carries an errant lamb on his shoulders as he descends a mountain of boulders. He looks directly at the viewer as if caught in the act of doing his job. In "The Sower" (p. 26), Jesus is portrayed in a classic pose: a barefoot, vigorous man is casting seed by hand as the sun sets behind him. "Jesus Goes up Alone Onto a Mountain to Pray" shows a backlit Jesus viewed from below, standing atop a pinnacle, the dark blue sky behind him speckled with stars and illumined by a crescent moon.

Ironically, Jesus looks strong, both physically and spiritually, throughout his passion and crucifixion. In "Consummatum Est: It Is Finished," Jesus has summoned a community behind him; he no longer seems lost in a crowded spectacle. Here God's presence is depicted as a triangle within a star of David, the Spirit by a dove; and the prophets holding scrolls stand behind Jesus on the cross. Jesus keeps heavenly company.

And in "The Resurrection" (this page), Christ, his wounds aglow, bursts from the tomb and hovers above the guards, who have been knocked to the ground as if hit by an explosion. Their lanterns are still swinging.

Although Tissot strove for historical realism, his images of spirits, angels and demons are highly imaginative, as fantastic and modern as a still shot from James Cameron's "Avatar." In one of the temptation scenes, "Jesus Transported by a Spirit Onto a High Mountain," a huge, shadowy figure lifts a shimmering, white-robed Jesus upward, as in flight, through a purple sky.

After years of intense labor, Tissot exhibited his work in Paris, then in London and the United States. Viewers responded with reverence, awe and tears. Crowds were hushed. Most reviews were laudatory, though not all; one likened the realistic style of the work to a Baedeker guide. When the series was published, the Tissot "Bible" became an international best seller.



In 1896, at age 60, Tissot returned to Palestine to begin a similar series of illustrations of the Old Testament. He completed 95 watercolors and many drawings before his death in 1902. That collection is currently held by the Jewish Museum in New York City.

Last year, for the first time in 20 years, the Brooklyn Museum, which owns the "Life of Christ," exhibited more than 100 images. The museum also produced a catalogue of the entire set, *James Tissot: The Life of Christ*, and placed the images online as part of its searchable collection. A traveling exhibition is currently being planned.

The revival is well timed. Events in the Middle East dominate the news, offering contemporary connections to Tissot's work. It is difficult to see Tissot's "Maltreatments in the House of Caiaphas," for example, without thinking of the abuse committed by the United States military at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. In the artist's painting, a bound and blindfolded Jesus is taunted, poked and pulled at without mercy. The art world has also seen a resurgence of interest in figurative and narrative art. Tissot's images blend realism and romanticism in a Victorian style that still appeals to many museumgoers. They do not startle the viewer as they once did but now look familiar. Indeed, Hollywood epics have been based on them. And scenes of the suffering of Jesus from Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" and the appearance of the Ark of the Covenant in Steven Spielberg's "Raiders of the Lost Ark" both owe a debt to Tissot.

To believers, Tissot's images reveal something more: signs of a vibrant Christian imagination. He did more than represent the land where Jesus walked. Tissot saw himself as a spiritual pilgrim. He reflected on each image and seems to have placed himself in the scenes as the various characters, much as St. Ignatius Loyola recommends in the Spiritual Exercises: as a prodigal son, a child of Jerusalem, a Roman soldier, a mother with a sick child, a condemned thief, a woman at the empty tomb and a convinced follower. Tissot's visionary images can also help viewers to do the same.

ON THE WEB

Karen Sue Smith offers a video reflection on James Tissot's paintings.
americamagazine.org/video

"THE RESURRECTION," BY JAMES TISSOT. PHOTO: BROOKLYN MUSEUM

BOOKS | WAYNE A. HOLST

THE ORIGIN OF ORTHODOXY

JESUS WARS

How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years

By Philip Jenkins
HarperOne. 352p $26.99

If you seek a credible study of how evil profoundly defiled ancient church councils, read Philip Jenkins's new book, *Jesus Wars*. If you seek clarity about how one of those same church councils produced timeless teachings about Christ still honored by Catholic, Orthodox and most Protestant Christians today, you should also read this book.

This is a perceptive study that challenges the common wisdom about how lofty Christian doctrine was formulated amid human chaos, and it all centers on the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.)

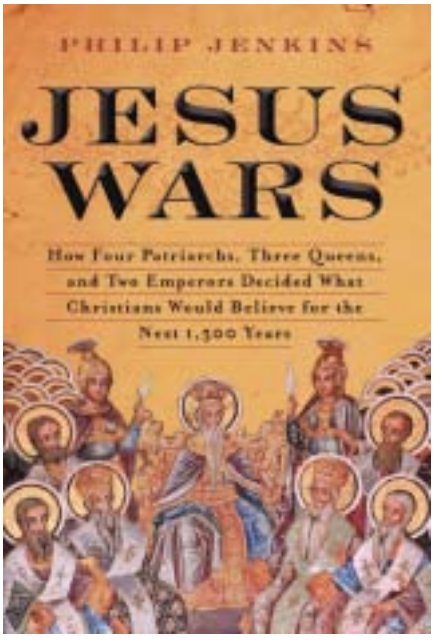
The author helps the reader see that the key factors at work were often not religious but of other kinds. "When we look at what became of the church's orthodoxy," observes Jenkins, "so many of those core beliefs gained the status they did as a result of what appears to be historical accident or the workings of raw chance."

It was not a matter of one side having better theological views than the other. All had good people and arguments. "What mattered," the author points out, "were the interests and obsessions of rival emperors and queens, competitive ecclesiastical princes and their churches, and the empire's military successes or failures against particular barbarian nations."

In the long term, debates defining the meaning of Christ were settled by one straightforward issue: which side gained and held supremacy within the Christian Roman Empire and was therefore able to establish its particular view of orthodoxy.

In truth, the Roman Church became right because it survived. "It was all mere chance and accident—unless, of course, we follow a tradition common to Christians, Jews and Muslims of seeing God's hand in the apparently shapeless course of worldly history."

Jenkins is known for helpful insights like this. He teaches and writes at Penn State and Baylor Universities (previous books reviewed in **America** include *The New Faces of Christianity* and *The Lost History of Christianity*). Why study the protracted debates over the two natures of Christ, which was the theological



thread running through that entire era? The author charts the course of theological evolution and shows that it was important to ancient audiences who believed theological orientation had practical consequences for state and society.

Why did ordinary people get so passionately involved in such intricate debates? Jenkins shows that when court rivalries shaped theological exchange, having the "right" theology meant having the kind of empire God favored. Even the slightest concession to error in such essential matters was understood to affect the substance of Christian truth.

Guided by Jenkins, readers can engage early councils strategically, without drowning in historical minutiae and are alerted to the developing story within the story. This era, remote to us, set precedents that influenced the Christian world ever since; the Catholic/Orthodox split; the

Todo-Nada

Here is the coin carried by John of the Cross.
On one side: todo—everything—the gift.
On the other: nada—nothing—vacant space.
He fingered this penny every day,
touched the gift of God's impinging love,
caressing the pain and suffering of empty space.
Well worn, this copper piece,
calluses on both thumb and forefinger.

John was in touch with the mystery,
the paradox of everything and nothing,
of life coming through Jesus
and a dying unto oneself.

ROBERT F. MORNEAU

MOST REV. ROBERT F. MORNEAU *is auxiliary bishop of the diocese of Green Bay, Wis. This poem first appeared in* The Color of Gratitude *(Orbis).*

Reformation; early-modern Victorian battles between faith and reason, and others.

Councils like Chalcedon are important because they debated pivotal, timeless issues like the quest for authority in religion, the relationship between church and state, the proper ways of interpreting Scripture, the ethics and conduct demanded of Christians, and the means of salvation.

What ultimately became known as Christian orthodoxy was hammered out in a process that was painfully slow, gradual and often bloody. We trace the development of Christianity and are helped to understand how it and other world religions evolve in new circumstances. For example, some modern African Christian and Islamic religious behaviors show parallels to ancient conciliar times.

Four sees played primary roles in the councils under consideration—Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome. The councils were centers of political theater and action. Powerful prelates were linked to powerful political leaders. Fortunes rose and fell.

In defining Christ as both fully divine and fully human—having one personhood but two natures—Chalcedon formulated a solid theological base for communions like Rome and Constantinople. It also set the stage for the tragic condemnation of the Antiochene and Alexandrian churches. The Nestorian and Monophysite traditions were declared heretical. As a result, the emerging churches of Western Christendom effectively lost half their world.

Eastern Christendom was weakened through internal dissension and ultimately all but destroyed when Islam emerged as a new religious force with which it had to contend.

Many of the quarrelsome issues surrounding Chalcedon survive to modern times and remain alive in con-

temporary understandings, like the God who suffers with us—a view no longer viewed generally as heresy.

In his concluding chapter, Jenkins discusses what was saved from so much spiritual strife. After 1,500 years, the churches "have never found a path that avoids the powerful pressures of individual ambition and political interest. If nothing else, that experience argues strongly for being tolerant of nonessential expressions of the faith."

Jenkins concludes with amazement that the church has preserved the core belief that Christ was human as well as divine. Today that belief remains standard teaching for the vast majority of Christians. We need constantly to re-examine and restate the grounds of our belief, since the Chalcedonian formula is not only our end, but also our beginning.

The author might well have entitled his book *Back to the Future of Faith*.

ON THE WEB
Maurice Timothy Reidy reviews HBO's "The Pacific."
americamagazine.org/culture

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

RICHARD M. GULA

INTELLECTUAL INNOVATIONS

A HISTORY OF CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences

By James F. Keenan, S.J.
Continuum. 248p $29.95 (paperback)

Participants in sabbatical programs, clergy conferences or workshops for religious educators often ask me to recommend an article or book that will bring them up to speed on recent thinking in moral theology and the roles various contributors have played in developing the field. This book meets that need.

James F. Keenan, S.J., professor of theological ethics at Boston College, is already well known to readers of **America**. He is a prolific author with that special gift of being able to write for the academy and for people in the pews. His keen insight, fair hand, comprehensive grasp and friendly style make even the most intricate argument accessible to the reader. In this book you will find more of the same.

With this volume, Keenan joins the ranks of John Mahoney (1987) and Charles Curran (1997 and 2008) in providing another towering history of moral theology. Unlike Mahoney, who organized his work thematically, Keenan's is done by eras: the manualists (Chapter 2), the Reformers (Chapters 3, 4, 5), the Revisionists (Chapters 6, 7, 8) and global voices (Chapter 9). Whereas Curran restricted himself to developments in the United States, Keenan stretches farther, treating the huge European contribution as well as perspectives from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and feminist and black Catholic theology. There is clear need for a history like this.

One conclusion beyond question in this book is that Catholic moral theology is not monolithic. It has been marked by discontinuity, inconsistency and development. The 20th century witnessed a rich diversity of shifting methods and dialogue partners. Underlying all these differences, however, is a common interest—the search for moral truth. This goal of moral reflection has come to be realized in the sanctuary of our consciences where we hear the call of God to live Christian discipleship through charity.

As the subtitle of the book suggests, the axis of moral truth has shifted from actions to agency. The influential English manuals of Thomas Slater, Henry Davis, Heribert Jone, John Ford and Gerald Kelly that dominated the moral landscape in the first half of the century focused on moral pathology. Moral living was about avoiding sin; moral teaching was about providing norms for right conduct. Missing was the positive orientation to the moral life of responding to God's call to live virtuously as a disciple of Christ.

The reformers reoriented the moral life by making moral reflection more historical (Odon Lottin), more scriptural (Fritz Tillmann), more spiritual (Gérard Gilleman), more theological (Bernard Häring, Josef Fuchs, Charles Curran) and more personal (Louis Janssens and Alfons Auer). They offered a new identity to moral theology (from avoiding sin to conforming to Christ), a new focus (from action to agency), a new mentality (from classicist to historical consciousness) and a new point of departure (from canon law to theology).

The encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) marked the turning point in re-

examining the method and concepts of the manualists, and in reconsidering the location of moral truth in norms proposed by the magisterium. The turbulent period between *Humanae Vitae* and *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) was dominated by intense discussions of the notion of moral objectivity and of the process of moral reasoning. Keenan deftly handles the controversies of this period to show that what distinguished moral positions was not theology but philosophy, especially the anthropology that influenced interpretations of natural law. The essentialist anthropology of the classicists posits an a priori human nature with a fixed end that does not yield to experience or social-scientific claims. For them the principle of action is the laws of nature. For the historically minded revisionists, human nature is not a static object. Rather, human nature is the relational, embodied person in a historical world that we come to know only gradually and partially. The principle of moral action is not a fixed nature but reason discovering moral value by reflecting on experience.

As virtue ethics gained in ascendancy during the latter part of this period, prudence took its rightful place as the foundation of moral objectivity. Moral truth is found where prudence takes into account the totality of the moral reality (act, intention and circumstances, including consequences). In his last chapter, Keenan shows how virtue ethics serves as the most appropriate mode of moral reflection to meet the challenges of cross-cultural dialogue about how to express moral truth.

A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century is a remarkable achievement. The more I delved into the book the more I was impressed with Keenan's command of the issues and the literature across the globe. He seems to have omitted no one who has had a hand in shaping the development of moral theology, and he masterfully summarizes their core contributions. Footnotes are in abundance and identify significant works in many languages. This is the book for anyone interested in what has happened in moral theology and in who's who among its contributors. It is essential reading for graduate students of moral theology, since much of the history narrated here and the theologians who have shaped it remain unknown territory to many of today's students.

Keenan looks back through our past, not to deconstruct it with harsh criticism but to show us that through a persistent search for moral truth, moral theology is innovative in utilizing valid advances in human knowledge. These new understandings of what it means to be human can then help us to discern the ways God is calling us to live as disciples in charity.

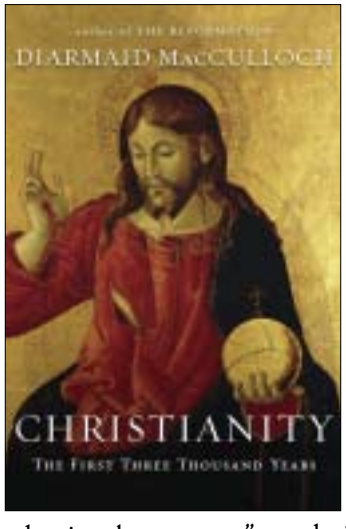
RICHARD M. GULA, S.S., *is professor of moral theology at the Franciscan School of Theology of the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Calif.*

JOHN W. O'MALLEY

INTO EVERY CORNER OF THE GLOBE

CHRISTIANITY
The First Three Thousand Years

By Diarmaid MacCulloch
Viking. 1184p $45



Every history of Christianity I am familiar with begins with the Gospels. Diarmaid MacCulloch begins a millennium before that with ancient Greece and Israel. That is the first feature that sets this book apart from its competitors and justifies its subtitle, "The First Three Thousand Years." The second feature is the author's stunning erudition. In the introduction, he describes the book as an attempt "to synthesize the current state of historical scholarship across the world." That is quite a claim, especially for a subject as sprawling, complex and multicultural as the history of Christianity, but MacCulloch commands that vast literature as well as anybody I can imagine. Being an editor of the Journal of Ecclesiastical History has put him in the enviable situation of having every book of merit cross his desk. He seems to have devoured them all and gobbled up lots of articles for good measure.

Weighing in at three-and-a-half pounds in paperback and running to over 1,100 pages, *Christianity* is not for the fainthearted. Given its scope, small errors of fact are inevitable, but I ran across astoundingly few. MacCulloch's judgment on events and personalities is obviously a more tangled issue. He states in the introduction that the book is a "personal statement," an admission all honest historians must echo for whatever they write. Good historians realize that an autobiographical dimension colors their work. They try to use it in ways that enhance rather than vitiate their enterprise.

Raised in an Anglican country parish, the scion of three generations of pastors, MacCulloch at a certain point gave up his Christian faith. He describes himself, however, as "a can-

did friend of Christianity," and in the main the book reflects his appreciation of his subject. His description of late-medieval Corpus Christi processions as "showing how the Church brought the love of Christ to every corner of Western life" is remarkable for judging so positively a phenomenon sometimes disdained, and it is an example of his friendship in operation.

But he of course has his bias. In general he shows more sympathy for the margins than for the mainstream. He is skeptical of "orthodoxy." He nurses a decided, certainly not always unjustified, suspicion of ecclesiastical authority and occasionally succumbs to the hermeneutic dominant in religious history for the past several decades of reducing all exercise of such authority to greed for power. MacCulloch writes beautifully and with wit, but sometimes also with a detached irony that will not please everyone.

Let the reader, then, beware. Let the reader also be appreciative of a remarkable achievement. MacCulloch began his career as a specialist in the English Reformation but widened his perspective to produce the best general history of Christianity in that period currently on the shelves, *The Reformation* (2004).

Remarkable in the present book is the attention he gives to the Orthodox churches in their various forms and to the global impact of Christianity in both its Catholic and Protestant incarnations. He devotes a full (and extremely welcome) chapter to "Islam: The Great Realignment, 622-1500." Put differently, he does a good job of breaking out of the Eurocentrism that characterizes so many general histories of Christianity.

All historians must make choices about what to include, what to omit and how much emphasis to give to different phenomena. For my taste he underplays the importance of Pope Stephen II's recourse to King Pippin for aid against the Lombards. He gives shorter shrift to the Gregorian Reform than I would do, although he sees it as a factor in the great turning point in Western Christianity that took place in the 11th and 12th centuries. In his otherwise excellent treatment of Renaissance Humanism, he fails to mention the greatest impact the movement had on the West: its launching in a newly institutional form the style of student-centered education that until recently dominated wherever Christianity had established itself. And so forth.

Quibbles and qualifications like these do not detract from MacCulloch's accomplishment but confirm what he is at pains to point out: Christianity is an enormously complex phenomenon. It is a religious tradition in which a few elements have persisted with striking consistency through different climes and cultures for centuries upon end, but in which diversity and mutations are equally striking. Paradox is at its heart. It is too big for simplistic formulae.

MacCulloch puts it well:

> "Traditionalists" often forget that the nature of tradition is not that of a humanly manufactured mechanical or architectural structure with a constant outline and form, but rather that of a plant, pulsating with life and continually changing shape while keeping the same ultimate identity.

That is a timely observation. In my opinion one of the greatest problems in Catholicism today is ignorance of the tradition in its breadth and diversity, which results in a dangerously truncated view of what it means to be a "faithful" Catholic. *Christianity* is an excellent antidote for that scourge. Thank you, Dr. MacCulloch!

JOHN W. O'MALLEY, S.J. *is university professor in the department of theology at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.*

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LETTERS

Worthy of Recognition

Re "Historian's Progress" (Current Comment, 3/29): I am a long-time reader and admirer of Tony Judt's work. How wonderful of **America** to recognize his most recent work in The New York Review of Books. I do not know which is more worthwhile, his essay "Night" or his book *Postwar;* but both reflect a moving, authentic human voice, and we are the richer for having them made more available to us.

ANN PRENDERGAST
Conesus, N.Y.

I started reading *Postwar* under the prodding of my son. I finished it because its remarkable range and compelling vision really gave me no other choice but to do so. Judt's support for his younger colleagues is equally or even more admirable. Thank you for recognizing him in this way.

RICHARD SALVUCCI
San Antonio, Tex.

Always Grateful

Thank you for the Scripture reflections in The Word, by Barbara Reid, O.P. The reflection on the prodigal son parable (3/8) was especially meaningful. It will find a place where I can come back to it in the future.

JUDY KIPKA
Bloomington, Minn.

On Not Swatting Flies

Re the poem "Ahimsa," by Edwin L. Millet (3/15): Over 50 years ago, on a weekend retreat at the Trappist monastery near Bardstown, Ky., our retreat master grabbed our attention while practicing ahimsa. He let a large fly wander all over his face for several minutes while seeming to ignore it.

In the break between this session and the one that followed, we retreatants talked only about the fly and the retreat master's response to it. In "Ahimsa," Edwin Millet extended his 35-year teaching career: he added to my vocabulary and reminded me of a partially forgotten incident from my past. God bless you and him.

JUSTIN G. HUBER
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Seamless Universe

Re "Kosher Catholics?" (3/29): The seamless garment surely demands respect for all creatures and, indeed, the universe. The reverence for all creation alluded to in kosher dietary laws and in Teilhard's thought are of one cloth, one sacrament. One sees the unitary implications and potential here. Let's move with all haste toward this horizon. The God of all is there.

BILL EDELEN
Bardstown, Ky.

Beyond Kosher

Go vegetarian! Your life will be better for it. You'll enjoy an appreciation for all living things.

FRANCESCA BIBA
Chicago, Ill.

Fourscore and Seven Years

I am 87 years of age and this is the first letter to the editor I have written. Regarding health care ("The Urgency of Now," Current Comment, 3/15): Please, in your great wisdom, tell me how we are going to pay for it! You can quote all the reasons why we need it but you never mention how we should pay for anything. This country is tril-

CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

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lions and trillions in debt, and you want us to pass a bill that has no end of liability. Please help me understand the miracle.

GEORGE J. MOUTES
Van Nuys, Calif.

Good for a Laugh

In the middle of the night, catching up on the March 15 issue of **America**, I laughed out loud at "That would be putting Descartes before the horse" (Current Comment, "Descartes in Pennsylvania"). How pleasant to see moral philosophy with wit.

WILFRED L. GUERIN
Shreveport, La.

Radioactive Main Street

"The Cost of Uranium" (Current Comment, 3/15) encouraged my work trying to make known the health risks in processing uranium. Thank you for raising this justice issue. Our city is in the process of renovating Main Street and discovered that the yellowcake buried 50 years ago in the roadbed is highly radioactive. The city cannot afford to remove all of it, so this legacy remains to challenge future generations. Therefore Grand Valley Peace and Justice, our Catholic social justice organization, is protesting a proposed new uranium mill in Paradox, Colo., that will bring more uranium mining and trucking into our area.

FRAN DIDIER
Grand Junction, Colo.

Beyond Keyboarding

"Erasing One of the Rs" (Current Comment, 3/22) talked of keyboarding replacing penmanship but only looked so far. In my recent conversation with an orthopedist concerning Dragon software for voice communication with a computer, the doctor suggested that just as today's kids react, "You used a telephone with a dial?" tomorrow's kids will say, "You used a keyboard?"

SUE WASHBURN
Dorset, Vt.

Held Fast in Peace

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (C), APRIL 11, 2010

Readings: Acts 5:12-16; Ps 118:2-24; Rv 1:9-19; Jn 20:19-31

"Anyone you hold fast is held fast" (Jn 19:23)

In 1989 Sister Thea Bowman was invited to speak to the U.S. bishops about the needs of the black Catholic community. At the end of her address, she asked the bishops to sing with her and to link arms, as in the days of civil rights marches. Weakened from the cancer that would take her life the following year, she nonetheless led the bishops with her powerful voice as they joined her in singing "We Shall Overcome."

She invited them to stand up and reach out and take each other's hands, which they did. "No, not like that," she admonished, as they tentatively took one another's hands. "Cross your arms over your chest and then take the hands on either side," she instructed. "That's how we did it in the civil rights marches. You have to move in together, close to one another, and hold on tight so that no one is lost in the struggle."

The instruction to hold on tight to one another is part of Jesus' recurring message in the Gospel of John. After feeding the multitude he says that God's will is that he should lose "nothing of all that has been given me" (6:39). Speaking as a shepherd, he declares that no one will snatch his sheep out of his hand (10:28). In his final prayer he says he guarded all those that the Father had given him and not one of them was lost (17:12; see also 18:9). In today's Gospel, when the risen Christ appears to the fearful disciples, he empowers them to continue his mission of drawing all to himself (12:32) and not allowing any to be lost in the struggle.

Jesus equips the disciples with everything they need to continue his mission. First, he opens the locked doors of their hearts to recognize that he is standing in their midst. He had assured them that he would not leave them orphaned (14:18) and that he would abide always with them (15:4-10). He had also told them he would give them a peace unlike the peace that the world gives (14:27).

As the risen Christ stands in their midst, we see that his peace comes from letting go of fear and the desire for vengeance and from surrounding the violence with forgiveness and reconciliation. This kind of peace does not ignore the brutal suffering inflicted on the victim. Jesus holds out his wounded hands and side as evidence that is never erased. The pain from the violence can be transformed, however, into joy and peace through the power of the Spirit and through the abiding presence of Christ, who makes possible forgiveness.

The disciples are not to stay huddled together in fear behind locked doors but are sent by Christ to continue his mission of healing and forgiving. Just as the Creator breathed life into the nostrils of the first human creature making it into a living being (Gn 2:7), so Jesus breathes life into the disciples, empowering them to forgive everything and everyone they can. The second half of verse 23, usually translated "whose sins you retain are retained," does not have the word *sins* in the Greek text. A better way to understand it is "anyone you hold fast is held fast." The sense is that through processes of forgiveness and reconciliation, disciples of Jesus continue his mission of holding on to all, arms folded across our chests, clenching each hand tightly, so that none, especially the most vulnerable, are lost in the struggle.

Not all follow the same process toward embracing the peace Christ extends. As the scene with Thomas affirms, disciples encounter the risen Christ at different times and in different ways. Some come to believe through seeing and through signs, others without these visible means. Both ways are blessed and lead to life in his name.

BARBARA E. REID

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Ask the Risen One to breathe new life into whatever area needs his empowering Spirit.
- Pray for the gift of forgiveness that can unleash peace and joy.
- How do you experience the abiding presence of the risen Christ?

ART: TAD DUNNE

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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