America

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The Wounds of Appalachia

KYLE T. KRAMER

Fall Books I

OF MANY THINGS

Living in a flood-prone suburban area, I know firsthand the devastation and damage water is capable of causing. I grew up dealing with floods—of the sewer-water variety—pitching in, when I was old enough, to assist my parents and siblings in the massive clean-up. We used brooms, wet-dry vacs and shovels to move the muck-filled water out the back door from our basement.

On one occasion the water level was high enough to seep through an oven door. (We had a kitchen area in the basement in those days and ate most of our meals downstairs.) Out, of course, went the oven along with the small fridge and other items. Each flood over the years brought certain loss, so we eventually had a barricade built between the outer and inner doors hoping it would hold off rising sewer water headed to our basement door.

Nowadays, still here in my original home (which has been continually renovated and redecorated), I find myself listening closely—and with trepidation, to be honest—when weather forecasts call for heavy wind-driven rains. It is then, for "protection," that I light and burn pieces of palm (reserved from Palm Sunday) in a small container. 'Tis an old Irish superstition, methinks—but I'll try anything to escape Mother Nature's fury.

Unfortunately, nothing could have helped on the morning of Aug. 8, 2007. When the rains came, I watched from an upstairs window and within a matter of minutes lost sight of the top grate of the nearby sewer plate. It was beneath the rising waters. Again helplessness, despite my having fortified the back door. In no time, neither the barricade nor tons of towels (and prayerful, tearful pleas to God) were of any use. Over three feet of muck and water inundated my lovely finished basement. Outdoors automobiles were floating all over the place.

FEMA sent crews and industrial-strength equipment to help with the cleanup afterward and the removal, over a period of days, of discarded items from each house on the block. I lost thousands of dollars worth of belongings in a heartbeat. I submitted a detailed list, with price estimates, to FEMA—but, alas, after their two visits to my home and letter exchanges, my own and my neighbors' appeals were turned down.

Among the many items on my list: a brand new high-rise, a recliner, a stocked cedar chest (which actually floated across the room), a computer station, expensive luggage, cabinetry and an entire bathroom wall, which nearly collapsed.

But among the most saddening losses were a large box containing dozens and dozens of hand-made (by my aunt) Christmas tree ornaments and a carton of photos and family memorabilia. These were priceless and irreplaceable. I felt violated. Of course, as I contemplate the destruction and displacement endured by millions of families not only in the United States but across the world, I know my situation is far from dire. I keep that in mind whenever a flood threatens my little world.

I learned a lesson on that August day. The flood, in a way, forced me not only to clean up but to prioritize items according to need and importance so I could place them safely. It also taught me to treasure the valuables I still have (some photo albums in the garage, for example) and be grateful to the Lord for my personal safety, the sturdy roof over my head and, equally important, the solidarity we neighbors experienced among ourselves. Everyone reached out to assist others, especially single homeowners like myself, even as they battled their own messes. There are no barricades between us. And that, in my book, is a real treasure indeed.

PATRICIA A. KOSSMANN

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Cover: Chuck Nelson, 57, a retired miner, surveys a mountaintop removal coal mine on Kayford Mountain, W.Va., in September 2007. Photo: Reuters/Andrea Hopkins/Files

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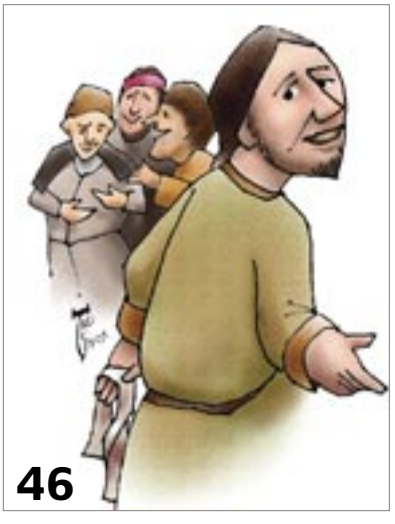

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The New Mass

In Advent 2011, there may be plenty of surprised Catholics in your parish. The Vatican recently approved the final version of the new English-language translation of the Mass texts after a decades-long, byzantine process. **America** readers will be familiar with the controversy surrounding the approval (as well as the "What if We Just Said, 'Wait'?" movement). Overall, the new translation is a word-for-word replication of the approved Latin text rather than one aimed at conveying a more general "sense" of the Latin. A few Catholics will be delighted by the more high-toned language; some will be dismayed at overly fussy words; most will probably miss the "old" Mass (a k a the Novus Ordo), which did not seem to need much tinkering. There are some striking changes. Christ now died not "for all," but "for many" (the original Latin is *pro multis*). For a time, then, both priests and the faithful will have their eyes glued on their sacramentaries and missalettes.

In preparation for the introduction of the new texts, the U.S. bishops have announced an ambitious catechetical program. But is this a case of closing the church doors after the liturgical horses have fled? It is unlikely that any catechesis will convince Catholics who think otherwise that the new translations are an improvement over the old. Perhaps the best that the bishops' program can do is remind Catholics of the centrality of the Eucharist, the "source and summit of the Christian life," as the Second Vatican Council taught. The Mass is still the place where Catholics meet God in the most profound way. And that is the invitation for all, not just many.

Who Is Not Coming?

A report issued in September by the Pew Hispanic Center, based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, shows that the size of the unauthorized immigrant population has been shrinking since mid-decade and continues to shrink—a marked reversal. The inflow of unauthorized immigrants was nearly two-thirds smaller between March 2007 and March 2009 than it was from 2000 to 2005. As a result experts have lowered their estimate of the total number of unauthorized immigrants living in the country: from 12 million in 2007 to 11.1 million in 2009. The decrease means nearly a million fewer people are living (not to mention working and paying taxes) in the United States. The drop has been most notable in U.S. states along the southeast coast and in the mountain west, especially Arizona, Colorado and Utah.

Who are no longer coming? Mostly they are unauthorized immigrants from Latin America (the Caribbean, Central America and South America), but excluding Mexico. The number from Latin America declined by 22 percent between 2007 and 2009, while the number from Mexico peaked at around 7 million in 2007 and has leveled off.

This report tracks a notable trend reversal but offers no explanation for it. It does not show that increased border security or stronger anti-immigrant laws or fewer job opportunities are responsible. Nor does it suggest why the number of Latin American immigrants, in particular, is declining. Some will find the drop itself a positive development, a big problem shrinking, whatever the reason. Yet few big problems solve themselves. In this case the need for immigration reform at the federal level remains as long as there are millions of unauthorized immigrants among us.

Developing Obesity

Hunger and starvation continue to afflict the world's poorest countries, but in some poor nations obesity has also emerged as a growing problem. In the past two decades, rates of obesity have tripled in developing countries that have been adopting a more Western lifestyle in terms of food consumption, according to The New England Journal of Medicine. A study by the United Nations in 1999 found obesity in all developing parts of the world, and it tends to grow as income increases. Even in sub-Saharan Africa, where most of the world's hungriest people live, an increase in obesity is taking place, especially among urban women. The World Health Organization has pointed out that this pandemic originated in the United States, crossed to Europe and the world's other rich nations, and then appeared in even the world's poorest countries, especially in their urban areas.

Dr. Barbara Burlingame, a nutrition officer at the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, has noted that obesity often leads to micronutrient deficiency, which can lead in turn to such health threats as anemia, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. While starvation-level hunger remains one of the world's most serious food problems, the growing level of obesity in developing nations has created a new challenge that calls for more attention to the quality as well as the quantity of food. Much of the blame can be placed on multinational companies that market cheap, highly refined fats, oils and carbohydrates. The influence of the West, with its penchant for high-calorie and sugary fast foods, is a growing culprit that must be dealt with, along with profit-driven multinational companies.

Truly Catholic

When they hear the words *Catholic Church*, most people, Catholics included, think immediately of the Roman Catholic Church. But in fact the Catholic Church is a communion of many particular churches, of which the Western or Latin church, though the largest, is only one. The Annuario Pontificio, the church's global almanac, lists 22 Eastern churches in communion with Rome. They were once called rites, a term that distinguished them by language, liturgical tradition and theological patrimony. Since the Second Vatican Council, however, they have been recognized as churches *sui iuris* ("with their own law") that are "of equal dignity" with the Latin church. Among the oldest are the six historic Catholic churches of the Middle East: the Armenian, Chaldean, Coptic, Maronite, Melkite and Syrian Catholic churches. With them today are joined the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and a Latin vicariate in the Arabian peninsula. Pope Benedict XVI has called representatives of these churches to meet from Oct. 10 to 24 in a special assembly of the Synod of Bishops with representative bishops from the wider church to address the critical circumstances confronting the whole church in the region.

The last two decades have been inhospitable to Christians in the Middle East. Wars and economic sanctions have led to the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Christians, especially from Iraq. Armed conflict and political tensions have resulted in steady emigration of both Palestinians and Lebanese from their homelands. The rise of Islamic extremism and of Jewish radicalism has placed in doubt the possibility of continued co-existence among the three Abrahamic faiths. In addition, the refusal of the State of Israel to bring into effect the 1993 Fundamental Agreement with the Holy See and the inability of the two parties over a decade to conclude other negotiations have placed holy sites, church institutions, clergy and religious workers, and the faithful in a defensive posture. They find themselves constantly fending off new impositions and restrictions that impede a normal life for them in the Holy Land.

Two of the issues under consideration by the synod will be immigration and emigration. Immigration is a relatively recent but massive reality. The Latin Catholic population in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states is now almost as large as the combined population of the six other churches. It is made up largely of guest workers from the Philippines and South Asia. But most of the Latin Catholics, nearly two million, reside in Saudi Arabia where public observance of Christianity is prohibited.

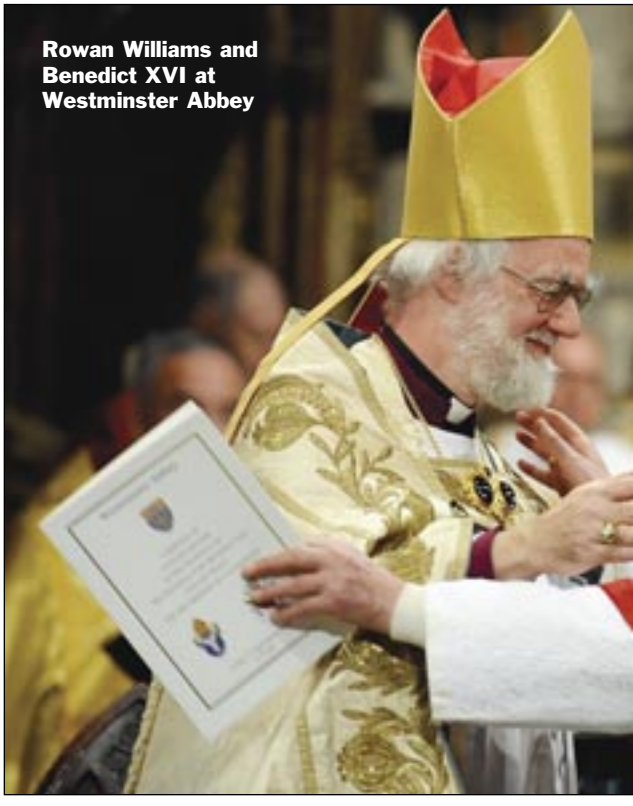
Emigration is a longstanding problem. Christians have been emigrating to Latin America, the United States, Canada, South Africa and Australia since the late 19th century. Today, however, emigration threatens the future of the churches of the Middle East, especially the Chaldeans, who have fled their native Iraq because of the religious persecution that followed the disorder created by the U.S. invasion in 2003. Across the region unresolved political and religious tensions continue to drive Middle Eastern Christians abroad, putting their historic communities in jeopardy. When they assimilate in their new countries, they are likely to lose their distinctive historic identities. Even when they remain Catholics, they are likely to join Roman Catholic congregations. In Argentina there are 300,000 Melkites but only three Melkite parishes. Preserving the rich patrimony of the Eastern churches is a challenge to the Roman Catholic Church, therefore, as well as to the Eastern churches.

These Middle Eastern churches are headed by their own patriarchs, but the patriarchs exercise full authority, "universal jurisdiction," only in the Middle East. In the diaspora, their authority is limited to matters of liturgy. One way to counter the effects of emigration would be to extend the range of their pastoral care and authority over these congregations. This is a proposal made in 1999 by the Eastern patriarchs and bishops themselves. Expanded pastoral authority could be coordinated with national hierarchies in arrangements similar to the military ordinariate or the new Anglican rite churches.

To begin with, expanded patriarchal authority would strengthen the ties of these diaspora Catholics to their home churches, creating a more direct relationship. It would also stem assimilation where it begins, with forced acculturation to the customs of the Western church, such as the requirement of a celibate clergy. Rome's primacy would not be challenged, but the catholicity of the church as a communion of churches and traditions would be enhanced. Ecumenically, Orthodox and other sister churches would see in a new form of governance ecclesial communion realized without Western dominance.

UNITED KINGDOM

Pope on Faith in Public Life


Rowan Williams and Benedict XVI at Westminster Abbey

Pope Benedict XVI's four-day state visit to the United Kingdom, the first ever by a pope, quickly overturned negative expectations of apathy and hostility. Bidding him farewell at Birmingham's airport, Prime Minister David Cameron told the pope he had made the nation "sit up and think" and seemed to suggest that secularism had not, after all, gained the upper hand. Faith, Mr. Cameron said, was "part of the fabric of our country...a vital part of our national conversation."

The prime minister's remarks suggested that the pope, who sought to deliver a sustained if gently reasoned salvo against what he called "aggressive secularism" and to mount a passionate case for the inclusion of faith in public life, was pushing at an open door. The invitation to Pope Benedict by Queen Elizabeth II to visit the kingdom was made under the previous Labour government, which had shown itself increasingly unwilling to recognize the Catholic Church's freedoms.

In 2007 the government passed antidiscrimination legislation and notoriously refused an exemption to Catholic adoption agencies that would have allowed them to reject adoption applications from same-sex couples. The closure of those agencies was a wake-up call to the bishops, who realized that they could no longer rely on the state to treat faith-based organizations equally in the allocation of resources, and pointed to a new "deafness" to the needs and freedoms of religion. The agenda of the papal visit—to open those ears again—was cast last year.

But in May this year a new government formed, speaking a new language, releasing the values and energies of faith organizations, among others, to build what it is calling the Big Society. The prime minister drew his ideas from Philip Blond, a philosopher whose thinking was formed by the Anglo-Catholic theologian John Milbank and Catholic social teaching on civil society.

On the eve of Pope Benedict's arrival, the Conservative Party chairman told Anglican bishops that the government would "restore faith to the heart of Britain," promising an end to the exclusion of the religious voice from public life. While this deft political maneuver helped to position the government as the beneficiary of a successful visit, it could have turned sour if the trip had gone poorly. As it happened, the visit has helped to consolidate the government's new faith-friendly stance.

The pope's call to recognize the necessary interconnectedness of faith and reason, religion and politics, belief and society was made in arguments that were as persuasive as they were reasonable. Although he returned constantly to this theme in homilies and speeches throughout his visit, the message was delivered most categorically in an address to political and civil leaders in Westminster Hall, the millennium-old Parliament chamber where Edmund Campion and Thomas More were sentenced to death for putting their conscience before the king. The sight of the British political establishment, including a row of former prime ministers, waiting patiently for the successor of St. Peter to address them from a gilded chair, then clapping enthusiastically as he entered to a fanfare of trumpets, will remain the icon of the visit. The fact of it happening at all, as the pope himself acknowledged, demonstrated that faith and public life were, after all, interlinked.

Westminster Hall left some wondering whether this was the end of the myth of Britain as a Protestant nation-state. "What was once considered inconceivable now seems entirely natural," said the Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, in his speech of welcome; history was indeed being made. The pope praised the toleration, fair-mindedness and pluralism of British democracy, and its many freedoms, but warned that if the moral principles underlying the ethical discourse of politics are "nothing more

solid than social consensus" then freedom and democracy rested on fragile foundations.

The pope referred to the economic collapse of September 2008 as an example of the consequences of "the lack of a solid ethical foundation for economic activity" in contrast to the abolition of the slave trade—one of Parliament's most famous achievements—as an example of "firm ethical principles, rooted in the natural law." The role of religion in political debate, he said, was "to purify and shed light on" reason, pointing it to objective moral principles, just as the role of reason was to prevent religion from falling into sectarianism and fundamentalism.

The pope went on to warn against a "failure to appreciate not only the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, but also the legitimate role of religion in the public square" and called for religious bodies "to be free to act in accordance with their own principles and specific convictions." This, he said, was the best guarantor of the freedoms that made Britain great.

Before and after Westminster Hall came two other papal firsts: a visit to Lambeth Palace, seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and an ecumenical service at Westminster Abbey, where the leaders of the world's Catholics and Anglicans prayed for church unity before the tomb of the pious 11th-century king, Edward the Confessor. "What we share, in Christ, is greater than what divides us," the pope told Archbishop Rowan Williams. Earlier, at Lambeth, the pope reframed the path to ecclesial unity as no longer about theological dialogue but about collaborating in witness to "the transcendent dimension of the human person and the universal call to holiness." He cited Cardinal John Henry Newman as exemplifying the "virtues that ecumenism demands."

The pope with David Cameron at Birmingham's airport

Pope Benedict's other triumph was his direct response to the chorus of searing criticisms of the church's (mis)handling of clerical sex abuse. On the flight to Edinburgh, he expressed his shock, sadness and shame at both the abuse and the church's failure to deal with it. At Westminster Cathedral he spoke of the "immense suffering caused by the abuse of children, especially within the church and by her ministers," and his "deep sorrow" at these "unspeakable crimes" and "the shame and the humiliation which all of us have suffered" in consequence.

As the anti-pope protesters were gathering later that day, accusing him of coverup, news came that he had met both with abuse victims and, for the first time, with church officials responsible for the safeguarding of young people. He congratulated them and the church for always reporting allegations to statutory authorities and praised the independent oversight built into the procedures and policies. The following day, after beatifying Cardinal Newman, he asked the bishops to make reparation for the church's sins by helping society tackle abuse.

The Mass for the beatification of Cardinal Newman, in front of a crowd of 70,000, was the pope's final public act during the visit. Having cleared a space in the public square for Catholics, Pope Benedict's final day was spent equipping the church to occupy it. He repeated Newman's call for "men who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand"; he told the bishops to welcome the new liturgical translation and its opportunities for catechesis; to raise their voice in defense of the disadvantaged; and to "encourage people to aspire to higher moral values in every area of their lives."

AUSTEN IVEREIGH *is the European correspondent for* **America**.

Large Turnout for First Meeting of Irish Priests

More than 300 priests—six times the expected number—attended the first meeting of the Association of Catholic Priests in Port Laoise, Ireland, on Sept. 15. The Rev. Brendan Hoban, an association founder, said the group does not claim to represent all Irish priests. "The association hopes to speak to the members of the Vatican's apostolic visitation to Ireland to voice our opposition to the new English-language translation of the Mass," Father Hoban said. "We believe the new translation...is over-complicated and over-Latinized.... It's another example of the church trying to fix things that don't need to be fixed and not fixing the things that need fixing." The group's goal is to work for "full implementation of the vision and teaching of the Second Vatican Council."

Moderate Jordan Offers Oasis for Christians

As conditions for Chaldean Catholics in Iraq deteriorate and political unrest threatens Christians in Lebanon, the Kingdom of Jordan remains a small oasis of relative calm for the Middle East's Christian minority. Bishop Selim Sayegh, the Latin patriarchal vicar for Jordan, told **America** that Christians in Jordan remain confident of their acceptance by the larger Muslim society as King Abdullah II remains a guarantor of their security. The Christian community is a disproportionate force in Jordan's parliament, and the Hashemite kingdom continues to draw both Christian and Muslim refugees from Iraq. The bishop said the encounter with Islam is completely different in Jordan from what many Americans might expect. "The government is moderate and trying always to give a good balance," he said. Christians and Muslims in Jordan practice the "dialogue of daily life" lived together.

NEWS BRIEFS

Robert Barron

More than 700 members and friends of the **National Council of Catholic Women** are expected to gather in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 10-13 to mark the 90th anniversary of the organization. ✦ A new public opinion poll, commissioned by the U.S. bishops' Pro-Life Secretariat and released Sept. 16, shows that 47 percent of Americans oppose federal funding of **embryonic stem cell research**, while 38 percent support it. ✦ **Kathleen Lunsmann**, a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was appointed president of Support Our Aging Religious. ✦ The Rev. **Robert Barron**, of the Archdiocese of Chicago, a priest, teacher and evangelist, is launching "Word on Fire With Father Barron," a weekly national program on WGN America beginning Oct. 3. ✦ **Americans for Peace Now** has developed a new Web site and smartphone application that uses data collected by Israel's Peace Now to provide a real-time, birds-eye view of the settlements in the West Bank. ✦ The Israeli military prosecution demanded that **Abdallah Abu Rahmah**, the coordinator of the Bil'in Popular Committee Against the Wall and Settlements, be sentenced to at least a two-year prison term after being convicted of organizing illegal marches and of incitement this past August.

African Bishops Ask For Regional Dialogue

Two Ugandan bishops, one Catholic and one Anglican, traveled to Washington, D.C., to tell State Department officials that regional dialogue with the Lord's Resistance Army would work better than a military option against it. The officials have until November to develop a strategy for disarming the L.R.A. "The issue is no longer the L.R.A. and Uganda," said Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu. "The issue now is regional." Archbishop Odama has headed the Archdiocese of Gulu in northern Uganda since 1999 and during that time has worked to end hostilities between the Ugandan military and the rebel Lord' s Resistance Army, which is known for its brutality. The L.R.A., once based in northern Uganda, has expanded its operations. Archbishop Odama traveled to Washington with Anglican Bishop MacLeord Baker Ochola II, retired bishop of Kitgum. Both men told Catholic News Service in mid-September that they do not oppose the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, which President Barack Obama signed into law in May, but were urging U.S. officials to end the use of force in dealing with the L.R.A.

From CNS and other sources.

THOMAS MASSARO

Urban Renewal

The book did not translate very successfully onto the silver screen, but Tom Wolfe's novel *Bonfire of the Vanities* certainly had its redeeming qualities. Even sub-par performances by Tom Hanks and Melanie Griffith in the film version could not mar the trenchant social commentary of this 1987 bestseller.

My favorite snippet was a piece of advice offered to the main character, Sherman McCoy, by another "master of the universe" (the novel's shorthand for wizards of Wall Street): "If you want to live in New York, you've got to insulate, insulate, insulate...yourself from those people."

Given the context, it is not hard to decipher the code language employed by this super-wealthy character. "Those people" probably included low-income residents of the city, members of suspect ethnic groups and social classes whose mere physical presence on subways and sidewalks constituted an affront to the limo-driven, doorman-shielded elites.

Anyone who has lived in a large, urban area recognizes the age-old dynamic. Distinct socioeconomic groups, though sharing a city or even a single zip code, can live in entirely separate worlds. Many of the characters in Wolfe's novel unabashedly aspired to keep it that way. They would do their best never to mingle with the common rabble on subways or sidewalks.

Vain would be any hopes for an overnight conversion of attitudes, among elites or any other groups. Overcoming petty prejudice and myopia regarding the common good is a slow process that requires a long arc of change, if such expectations ever come to pass at all.

But human attitudes are not the only factors that contribute to distressing practices of segregation. Like all social institutions, cities feature structures—systemic patterns for organizing human activities. Any structure created by humans can be changed by humans. The history of social reform is simply the march of ordinary people advocating changes to improve the lives of all, especially of the excluded and downtrodden.

Can urban planners tweak the physical infrastructure of our cities so that people of diverse backgrounds more easily mix on our sidewalks and parks? Is it possible for city designers and public works officials to create spaces more likely to be shared by members of diverse groups?

Recent travels, extended stays in unfamiliar cities and even a relocation to a new neighborhood in the same metropolitan area have me thinking lately about the shape of our cities and the daily flow of the lives of their inhabitants. New sights, like gated communities and elevated skywalks among downtown office buildings, jogged my memory of the *Bonfire* characters who struggled so mightily to "insulate." Even without any formal training in urban planning, I find it easy to conclude that urban living patterns in the United States are failing us on many counts. Public policies are often complicit in allowing willing parties to live in homogeneous cocoons.

Naysayers will surely remind me of the perennial danger of becoming self-righteous about such private matters, as one person is rarely in any position to pass judgment upon others' choices. And it may indeed be unfair to express summary disapproval of courses of action that simply do not fit one's preferences for the proper level of social mixing. Maybe a desire for personal security or a predilection for the familiar can justify a preference for social or geographical segregation. Perhaps a strictly secular worldview is capable of defending such a position.

> Cities place us in situations where many things are beyond our control.

But I do not think that a sincere Christian can in good conscience allow patterns of segregation to go unchallenged. The core social commitments of our religion to universal concern and solidarity impel us to embrace all people, no matter how different they seem to be, in a stance of trust, refusing to dismiss the other as a threat. At the risk of simplification: Whom would Jesus avoid?

What I have always loved about cities is that they place us in situations where many things are beyond our control. Unlike a suburbanite, the city dweller depends in innumerable ways upon the cooperation of many others to get through the day. At its best, an urban routine is a dance with many partners, interesting folk whose diverse qualities can delight and entertain. Anything that prevents mixing on the everyday streetscape stops the music and brings the dance to a halt.

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Kayford Mountian in Eskdale, W.Va.

PHOTO: BRETT MARSHALL/KERTIS CREATIVE

THE BIBLICAL INJUSTICE OF MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL

Appalachia's Wounds

BY KYLE T. KRAMER

To see creation at its finest, visit the Appalachian Mountains in West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. A region of rugged beauty, the southern Appalachians are the oldest mountain range in North America and one of the most ancient on earth. They teem with more than 10,000 known species of flora and fauna, the richest biological diversity in the temperate world. Lovely beyond words, these green hills echo Eden.

To see what hell on earth looks like, visit the Appalachian Mountains—specifically, an active mountaintop removal mining site. Mountaintop removal mining is the epitome of environmental destruction. With violence comparable to the detonation of a nuclear weapon, ground-shaking explosives and massive earthmoving equipment blow and bulldoze away a mountain's topsoil and hundreds of feet of rock to get at the coal seams below. Mining operations find it economical to shove the leftover rubble into nearby valleys. The result, even after so-called reclamation, is an ugly stump of a mountain—denuded of precious topsoil and timber and replaced by a thin-soiled plateau on which planted grass or trees struggle, and frequently fail, to survive.

Recently I visited this region with a group of filmmakers, writers, publishers, priests, ministers, teachers, entrepreneurs and activists. Our group came to witness the destruction firsthand, to hear from those whom it affects and to dream together of what a better Appalachian future might look like.

In the failing light of evening, we struggled through briars and thorns along an anemic stream tinged with orange, a sign of excess iron content. The stream's source was a stagnant retention pond at the foot of a "valley

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fill," the unholy burial ground of a neighboring peak that had been mined into oblivion. There, and in later gatherings, we heard story after heartbreaking story from local residents for whom mountaintop removal mining is a source of abuse and misery. They told us of the disappearance of their ancestral lands, of their homes choked with dust and debris from nearby mining operations and of house foundations cracking from the constant explosions. We heard about streams contaminated with chemicals or buried completely and of once-gentle streams that now flood destructively. We learned about wells dried up or made undrinkable because of heavy metals that have leached into the groundwater. In one case, well water contained so much methane that the homeowners had to keep windows open while showering or doing dishes to avoid an explosion.

Residents also told of mining companies using physical threats and intimidation, economic boycotts of local businesses and leverage against local politicians to prevent public objection to their practices. They said that some miners, eager to keep the few jobs highly mechanized mining provides, become foot soldiers in a neighbor-versus-neighbor campaign.

Despite the challenge of living amid soul-grinding poverty, some area residents—many of them nuns and priests—have risked their persons and property to face off with Goliath; their slingshot pebbles include community organizing, testifying at public hearings (which often requires police protection) and documenting mining abuses. Others, beaten down and hopeless, pleaded, "Tell our stories!"

This story is about corporate greed and the culture's willingness to sacrifice both natural and human capital for the convenience of cheap energy.

ON THE WEB
A conversation
with Kyle T. Kramer.
americamagazine.org/podcast

What could possibly justify mountaintop removal? In this region of Bible-believing Christians, some mining company representatives quote Scripture in their own defense: "Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley" (Is 40:4). Such outrageous proof-texting belies the real narrative, far from sacred, being written on the Appalachian landscape itself. This story is about corporate greed and the culture's willingness to sacrifice both natural and human capital for the short-term convenience of cheap energy.

Evil at Work

In the rage I felt after seeing the destroyed mountains and hearing of the resulting human misery, the word *evil* seemed—and still seems—the only fitting description of mountaintop removal mining. Evil is at work in the actions of individuals and corporations and in the structural failures of economics, politics and governmental oversight.

I resist pointing fingers too zealously, however, because I realize that everyone whose electricity comes from burning coal has a hand in this destruction. Rick Handshoe, an activist for Kentuckians for the Commonwealth and a local resident whose family roots in this area go back centuries, reminded our group: Whenever you turn on your light switch and write a check for your electric bill, "you'uns pay for this." And as the author Wendell Berry, a Kentuckian, has written, whenever a bulldozer tears into a mountainside, it does so by proxy for all of us. We Americans enjoy the benefits of abundant, cheap and reliable electricity. Cheap electricity powers my neighbor's dialysis machine, thank God, but is also wasted by inefficiency, always-on computers and television sets, and superfluous, power-hungry gadgets and luxuries. Coal companies do not ravage mountains for fun; they are driven by desire for profit. (To find out whether your electricity comes from mountaintop-mined coal, plug in your zip code to the database at www.ilovemountains.org.)

Evil works perniciously when cloaked in abstraction; it is far easier to destroy a place one does not know well and does not care for deeply. Ignorance helps, too. Since mining sites are not tourist hotspots, few people will ever witness firsthand the effects of the dirty work in Appalachia that keeps the nation's lights on. Many coal industry executives live and work far from the mines they own and control. At a meeting of my local electric co-op, a co-op employee (a longtime salaried professional who has made a living touting the virtues of coal) admitted in conversation that he has never seen a mountaintop removal site.

A New Appalachian Story

What can people of faith say and do in response? First, they must comprehend the staggering scope of destruction caused by mountaintop removal mining, then name it, lament it and acknowledge complicity. Second, in faith and hope they must imagine a new Appalachian story of reverence and justice.

No Christian could deny that this region reflects the

glory of the Creator. But unlike evil, reverence does not thrive on abstraction. Almost by definition, revering creation requires experiencing it firsthand, yet many of us will never visit Appalachia.

If Appalachia can be destroyed from a distance by underwriting energy companies, perhaps it can be revered from afar through an encounter with the tapestry of human life—the stories, poetry, music, art and photos—woven into these mountains. Perhaps we can begin to see that this place, like any place, has its own God-given dignity and integrity, which can stoke the contemporary religious imagination in the same way that Mount Horeb, the Temple Mount and Mount Tabor did for biblical writers.

One cannot revere a place and its people without desiring that both be treated with fairness and respect, for justice is reverence with legs. In *This Land Is Home to Me* (1975) and *At Home in the Web of Life* (1995), the Catholic bishops of Appalachia celebrate the land and people of this region and call vigorously for justice. These pastoral letters rehearse the concerns of Catholic social teaching: the dignity of the human person, the common good (across generations), solidarity, subsidiarity and care for creation, among others.

What would justice look like in relation to mountaintop removal mining in Appalachia? As I see it, justice in Appalachia would take three forms.

First, consumers of electricity and other citizens (including energy company shareholders) must demand immediately that energy companies stop using coal from mountaintop removal mining and that the federal government stop issuing permits that allow such mining. But since coal-fired power plants provide almost half the electric power used in the United States, they cannot be shuttered readily or converted quickly to run on alternate fuels. In the short term, more electricity should come from coal mined in a more environmentally responsible manner (though no form of coal mining is without adverse environmental effects). In the long term, however, low-carbon and renewable sources must be developed, including storage capacity to even out the intermittency of wind and solar power. Electricity will cost more. Subsidies to help those with low incomes pay for electricity must be expanded, as well as programs to help all consumers use power sparingly and efficiently.

The second form of justice would require reparations for damage done in Appalachia. Mined-away mountains are destroyed forever, but the land itself can be reclaimed more effectively than is now the case. Communities can be compensated for property damage and county water lines can be run in areas where groundwater has become undrinkable. Costly, yes, for both the mining companies and the government (taxpayers), but when damage is this egregious, justice is not cheap. Just ask BP.

Third, justice would mean that Appalachia would become economically and socially sustainable, as the Catholic bishops of Appalachia call for in *At Home in the Web of Life*. Decades of exploitation have left the local people in crushing poverty, with the accompanying social woes like drug and alcohol abuse, crime, domestic violence, poor education, welfare dependence and hopeless resignation. For the region to thrive, the extractive economy must be replaced with a regenerative one, based on sustainable forest products and agriculture, local business, tourism and appropriate technologies, including renewable energy. But these require a strong social fabric. The biggest challenge for Appalachians is to educate themselves, become healthier and to dream new dreams, freeing their energies to create a new, sustainable future where they live.

COAL FACTS

Every two seconds 100 tons of coal are extracted in Kentucky, West Virginia, Wyoming, Pennsylvania and about 15 other states.

Between 1979 and 2006 in West Virginia and Kentucky, **employment in mining** dropped 60 percent, mainly because of an increase in less labor-intensive surface mining. In West Virginia a total of 62,500 workers declined to 22,000; in Kentucky the number of workers declined from 47,000 to 18,000.

More than 500 mountains and 1.2 million acres of **hardwood forests** (about the size of Delaware) have been destroyed in the United States by mountaintop removal.

Only 35 percent of reclaimed mine land can support **fish and wildlife**.

Wind-industry jobs jumped 70 percent in 2008 in the United States. The total number of **wind-industry jobs** nationwide now surpasses the number of coal miners.

For each $1 million spent **retrofitting buildings** for energy efficiency, 19 jobs are created. Spending on coal, by contrast, creates 9 jobs; developing oil reserves creates 6 jobs.

Fine-particle pollution from coal-fired power plants causes more than 20,000 premature deaths a year in the United States.

More than 60,000 babies in the country are overexposed to mercury in utero from coal-fired plants; such **mercury overexposure** has been linked to poor academic performance later in life.

In 2006 the United States produced **1.16 billion tons** of coal, 70 percent of which came from surface mining.

Statistics gathered by the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (www.ccappal.org)

How? Although government must play a role, Appalachia's own residents must finally say no to an industry that has taken so much from them and given them back a dwindling number of jobs and a wrecked physical and social landscape. Local Protestant and Catholic churches and church-sponsored organizations could stop ignoring or legitimizing the status quo; they could inspire and organize the community, support efforts of resistance and positive change and provide encouragement and pastoral care during any long, uphill fight.

No one who has witnessed Appalachia's wounds can pretend such reversals would be simple or quick. Out of the deep soil of grief and lament, however, the stubborn, disciplined hope Appalachia needs can grow. I have seen such hope in some residents, like Rick Handshoe. Not optimism, it is rather a patient insistence that this place and people so crucified can, through God's grace and human effort, be resurrected. Then the story of these mountains will be one of resplendent natural beauty, and God's image will be reflected in a flourishing human community that has learned to live peaceably in its place.

Author's note: The mountaintop removal witness tour was organized by the Center for Interfaith Relations, which sponsors the annual Festival of Faiths in Louisville, Ky. (see www.interfaithrelations.org). A

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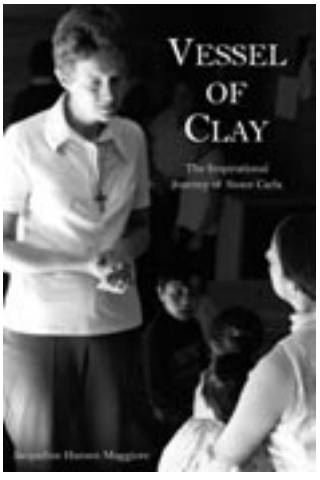

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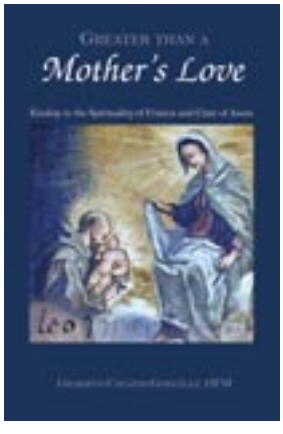

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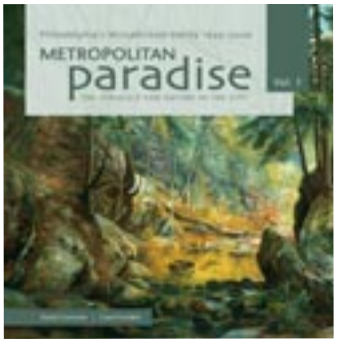

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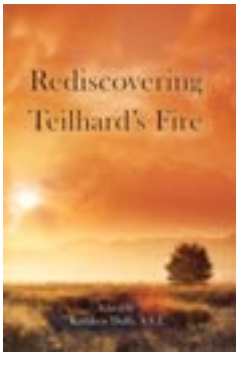

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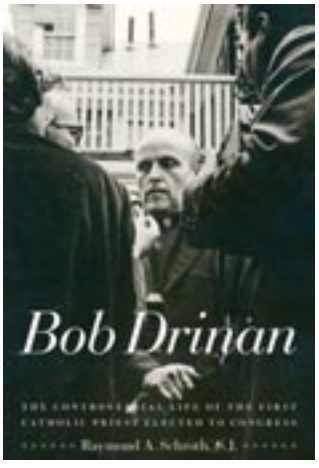

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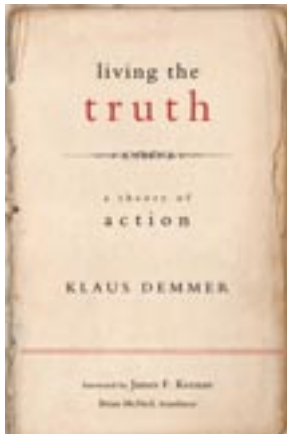

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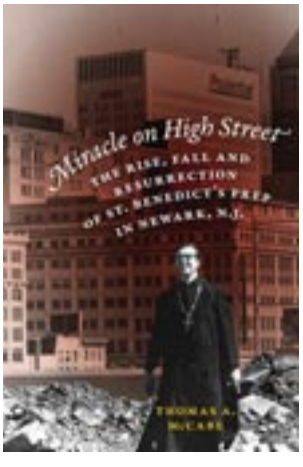

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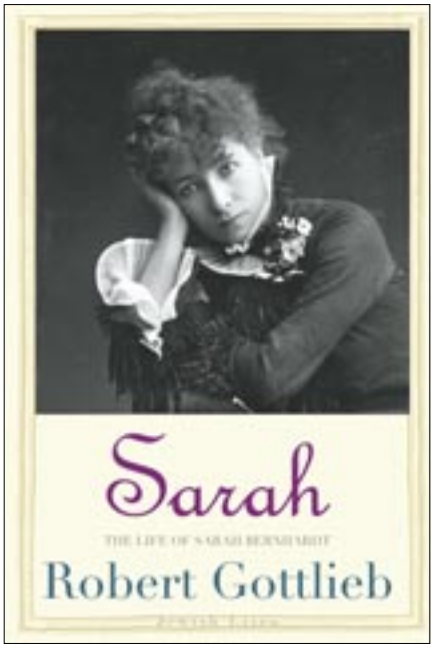
FALL BOOKS I | RICHARD A. BLAKE

SHE CAST A SPELL

SARAH
The Life of Sarah Bernhardt

By Robert Gottlieb
Yale Univ. Press. 256p $25

Great actors disappear into their roles. Sarah Bernhardt seemed to reverse the process, at least according to George Bernard Shaw, who judged her acting "childishly egotistical." In his opinion, she subsumed her characters and made them into reproductions of herself. Audiences related to Bernhardt, not Cleopatra or Camille or Athalie. So great was this hypnotic force that she conquered audiences around the world, even though she performed only in French. Her captivated fans, at least outside France, could dispense with the poetry of the lines or the dramatic action. They came to see Bernhardt and willingly, eagerly fell under the spell of her personality. Without question, she was the greatest actor of her generation throughout a career that lasted over half a century.



In his brief new biography, Robert Gottlieb tries to grapple with the mysterious, driven nature of the woman as well as the artist. A veteran editor at Knopf, Atlantic Monthly and The New Yorker, Gottlieb has dealt with driven genius before, most notably in his *Balanchine: The Ballet Maker*. Contributing the first in a projected 50-volume series entitled "Jewish Lives," a collaborative venture of Yale University Press and the Leon D. Black Foundation, Gottlieb traces much of Bernhardt's creative energy to her heritage. Born to an unmarried Jewish mother and an unidentified father in 1844, she received the name Bernhardt from her maternal grandfather, Maurice Bernard, an oculist from Amsterdam. Rejected and unloved by her mother, Sarah was placed in a convent school near Versailles, where she stayed for six years. At the age of 12, she was baptized, at the insistence of a stepfather. Neither Jewish identity nor Catholic faith did much to tame her appetite for life.

But all this early history is very confused, as Gottlieb points out through a series of wry asides that warn the reader not to believe all the events he recounts. Bernhardt was generous with biographers, but unfortunately, the unembellished truth bored her. Fantasies of the imagined self proved infinitely more interesting. Did she in fact as a child throw herself under a carriage to protest the departure of a beloved aunt, or did she fall out a window waving goodbye to her? The truth matters little. The theatricality of either version of the story is delicious, even if neither is true. Bernhardt considered her life a dramatic text that she could edit or a performance she could reinterpret as mood and audience dictated. A generous gallery of portraits shows that she could seduce photographers as readily as biographers.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ALICE

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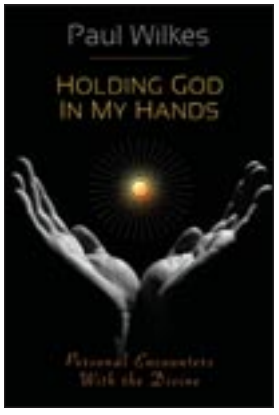

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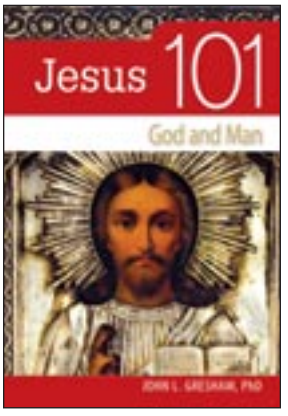

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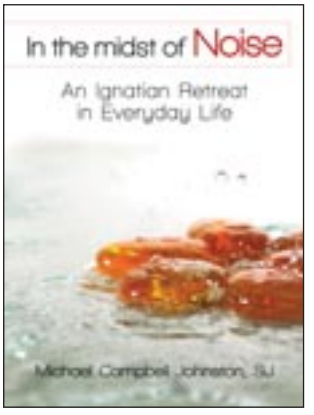

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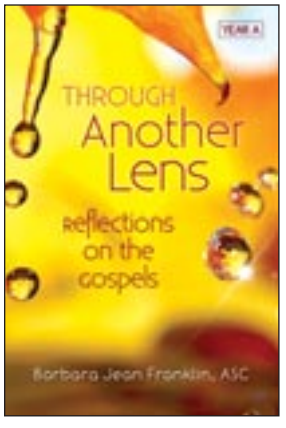

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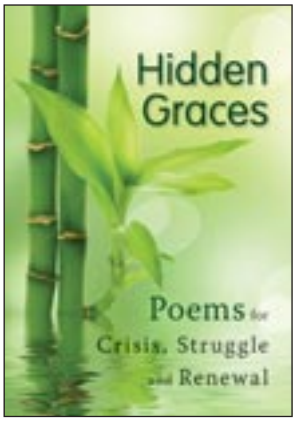

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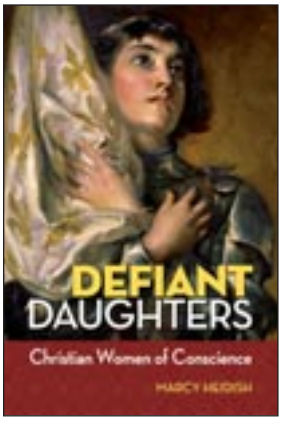

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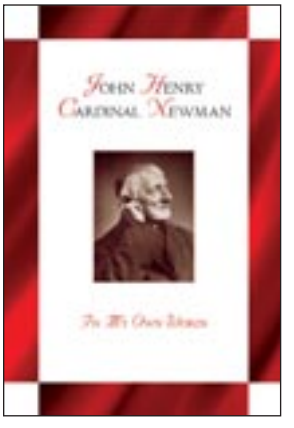

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As Bernhardt grows older the story grows a bit clearer. Her mother had supported her family by ingratiating herself with generous Parisian gentlemen. As the years inevitably put this source of income in jeopardy, she trained her daughters to continue the arrangements. Sarah rebelled, not because of moral reservation—her legendary exploits demonstrate amply that few such scruples troubled her at any period in her life—but rather because she refused to be dependent on anyone, her mother or her patrons. For a beautiful, slender girl with a talent for reciting poetry, acting seemed a natural way to gain the attention her mother had denied her. A major problem remained: she was not very good at it. A short stay at the Comédie Française brought no memorable successes. A notably bad review drove her to take poison. So she says.

By the age of 20, Bernhardt had left a second company and given birth to a son, whose father remains a matter of speculation and for whom she never offered apology. Determined to succeed, Bernhardt joined the Odéon, where her talent blossomed. One triumph followed another, and she traveled in the highest circles of French artistic life with the likes of Hugo, Dumas, Rostand and Zola. She did the great roles of the classic repertoire and the sentimental heroines of the 19th-century popular stage. She began her own theater company, overseeing its productions in detail and taking it on exhausting international tours. She despised the modern naturalism of Chekhov and Ibsen, however, a failure of vision that eventually made her declamatory style seem intolerably old-fashioned. She appeared in silent movies, a medium in which 19th-century gesticulation still flourished. She played the parts of much younger characters, but at some point the illusion of youth evanesced. No matter. Audiences continued to pack the balconies to see one of her mad tirades or death scenes. She performed demanding roles into her 70s, even after a leg had been amputated, supposedly because of damage done to it in childhood by falling from a window. Or was it from hurling herself in front of a carriage?

Clearly, her Jewish background never hindered her success. If anything, the anti-Semitic slurs she endured from rivals and hostile critics may even have hardened her resolve to face the world on her own terms, regardless of what people said about her. Attacks arise from jealousy, and jealousy is but the dark face of admiration. If some saw "the Jewess" as devoid of morality, as rapacious in gathering wealth, as deliberately defiant of the social norms of decent people, and if they attributed all of these characteristics to some stereotypical notion of "Jewishness," so be it. One role she could not play was that of the hypocrite. Her outlandish private life matched her out-sized acting style, and she reveled in both. She was endlessly fascinating. She was Sarah Bernhardt. What more is there to say?

RICHARD A. BLAKE S.J., *co-director of the film studies program at Boston College, is a former editor and long-time reviewer of films for* **America.**

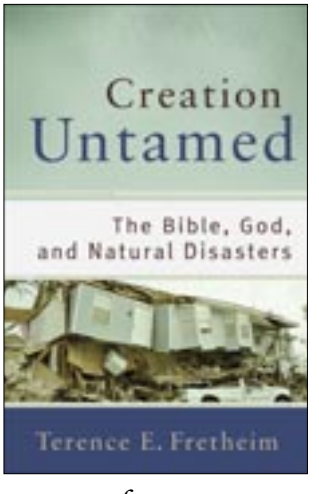
DANIEL J. HARRINGTON

JOB REDUX

CREATION UNTAMED
The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters

By Terence E. Fretheim
Baker Academic. 176p $19.99 (paperback)

In their frequency, severity and devastation, natural disasters (floods, wildfires and earthquakes) and human disasters (suicide bombings, drone airstrikes and gigantic oil spills) have become all too frequent in recent times. Their frequency tends to muffle the hard philosophical and theological questions that these events should bring to the public forum: Where is God in these disasters? Why do innocent persons suffer in them? Can anything good come out of these tragic events?



Here is a book by a veteran biblical theologian that bravely takes on these difficult questions in the context of the God and the world we meet in the Old Testament. Fretheim, professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis, considers how we might speak of God's relationship to natural disasters and the suffering and death related to them both in biblical times and now. Writing as an exegete and biblical theologian, he deals with the biblical texts as they stand in the Bible, though he is thoroughly conversant with the debates regarding their historicity. He insists that in dealing with natural disasters and suffering we not let God off the hook. After all, it is God's creation that we are talking about.

In treating the biblical creation narratives in Genesis 1–2, Fretheim contends that God created the world as good but not perfect (in the sense of a finished product, wrapped up

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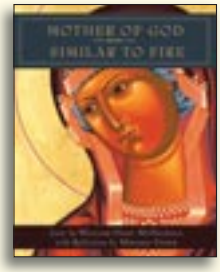

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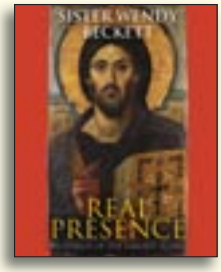

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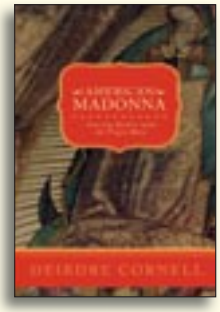

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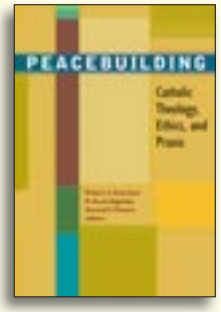

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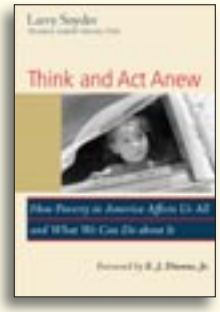

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with a big red bow and handed over to creatures to keep it exactly as it was created). While God did bring order out of chaos in the act of creating, the creation God gave us still has elements of "messiness" about it. That is because God has given a certain amount of freedom not only to us humans but also to all the forces in creation. The God revealed in Genesis 1–2 uses already existing creatures as material for creating new creatures, invites nonhuman creatures and the divine assembly to participate in creation and gives to humans an important role in further creating activities. Natural disasters happen when those factors collide and produce further "messiness." Nevertheless, natural disasters may also then be an integral part in God's way of bringing an ever new creation into being.

The account of Noah and the flood in Genesis 6–9 raises the issue of the role of human sin in natural disasters. Here again Fretheim is primarily concerned with the characterization of the God who has entered into genuine relationship with the world and uses natural agents (like flood waters) to carry out his acts of judgment. This God is also deeply and personally moved by these events, regrets what has happened with humankind in resisting God's will for creation, changes his strategy and charts new directions for dealing with the problem of sin and evil. He observes that the flood story shows that though human wickedness can make natural disasters worse, such disasters and suffering may come simply because God's world is quite dynamic and sometimes unpredictable, random and wild.

We often skip over the fact that many of the causes of suffering for Job and his family are natural disasters like windstorms, lightning and fires, and disease. When looked at through the lens of natural disasters and communal suffering, the book of Job deals with human suffering in the context of the complex natural order that God has created. This is the fundamental point of God's speeches from the whirlwind in Chapters 38–41. They emphasize that humans are finite, that God has created a dynamic (and sometimes turbulent and unruly) world and that God uses natural agents in creating the world. These speeches force Job to revise his legal, retributive justice-oriented view of God's creation and to rethink how God works in and through the world.

The textual analyses of Genesis 1–2 and 6–9, as well as the book of Job, lead into more general considerations of suffering and the God of the Old Testament. Here Fretheim insists on the importance of suffering people asking the "Why?" question and explains several biblical responses to it: Suffering is part of God's good creation; the consequence of sin and evil; the tragic effect of sin over time; and/or the effect of vocational choice (the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah and Jesus of Nazareth).

In the final chapter, devoted to faith and prayer, Fretheim argues that in the context of natural disasters and human suffering prayer may be considered an aspect of the gift of the relationship that God has established with humankind, whereby God and humans can meaningfully interact with one another. He maintains that this relationship is fundamental to thinking about the God of the Bible and the association of God and the world. In this context, prayer (especially lament and intercession) has an effect on the one who prays, on the relationship between the one who prays and God, on God and on persons or situations for which one is praying.

In dealing with the serious questions that emerge from natural and human disasters, Fretheim resists the temptation to find a single and/or easy answer. Rather, he forces us to rethink (like Job) who God is and how God relates to us and our world. For him, relationship, interdependence and freedom are the ways in which the God of the Bible shares his creative activity with his creatures, human and otherwise. He concludes that God has not created a world free of vulnerability and has chosen not to manage the world so that no one gets hurt. Indeed, the potential for suffering, he says, on the part of humans and animals is the cost of living in such a creative place.

While creation is ultimately in God's hands, in the meantime we are called to genuine engagement with God and the world in the conviction that the decisions we take will have significant implications for the future of this untamed creation and even for the nature of God's future.

DANIEL J. HARRINGTON S.J., *is professor of New Testament at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, and editor of New Testament Abstracts.*

THE WINDOWS

One's life lasts an hour or two
in the grand scheme of things.

For a while we hear the larks,
the blows come later.

What happens when birds sing
and then death stabs hard?

One late summer night a voice
reaches down to life's remains,

things calm, the windows close
and open to a different scheme.

LEONARD CIRINO

LEONARD CIRINO *is the editor of Pygmy Forest Press in Springfield, Ore. His latest collection is* Omphalos *(Pygmy Forest Press).*

ST. ANTHONY MESSENGER PRESS New Releases
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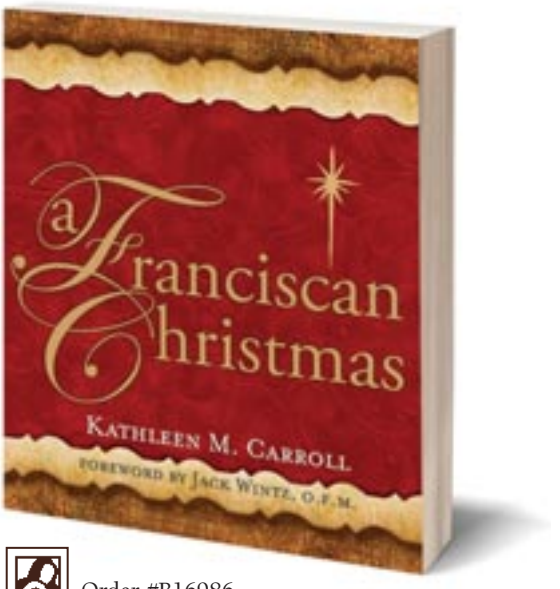
A Franciscan Christmas

Kathleen M. Carroll
Foreword by Jack Wintz, O.F.M.



The true meaning of Christmas isn't found in the glitter and gifts. It's not on the tree or tucked under it. It won't be served with the cookies and eggnog. But it can be found in a place of honor in most Christian homes: the Christmas crèche.

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KATHLEEN M. CARROLL is managing editor of books for St. Anthony Messenger Press. She is the author of *Keeping the Faith in Ohio: Words of Hope and Comfort from Our Spiritual Leaders* (Emmis).

JACK WINTZ, O.F.M., is the author of *Will I See My Dog in Heaven?* (Paraclete) and *Friar Jack's E-spirations.*

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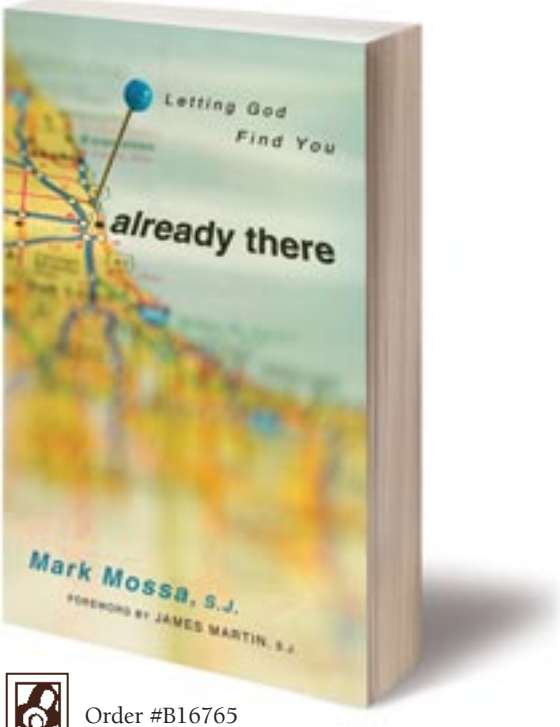
Already There

Letting God Find You

Mark Mossa, S.J.; Foreword by James Martin, S.J.



The spiritual life is about making connections. Mark Mossa's friends tell him that he has a talent for making weird (they politely say "different") connections. He responds that images, lyrics, and repeatedly quoted lines from popular culture stick with us because they connect with something deep down inside of us and say something meaningful about our human experience.

We need only take some time to reflect on our experience — and that is what Mark Mossa helps us to do — and we'll see that God has already been trying to communicate with us in unexpected and surprising ways. Maybe even weird ways!

MARK MOSSA, S.J., spent his early adult years trying to figure out where God wanted him. At 27 he finally realized he was already there. Two years later he became a Jesuit and now he finds himself a priest. He currently studies and teaches theology at Fordham University in the Bronx, and occasionally updates his blog, "GODsTALKed: Pursuits of a Hyphenated Priest."

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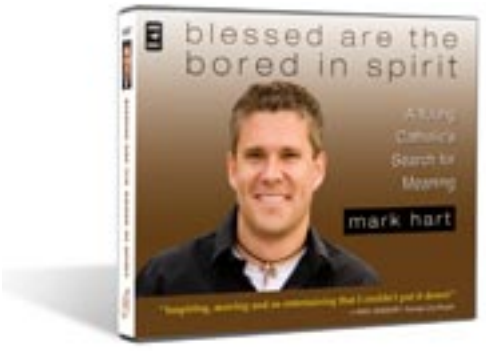

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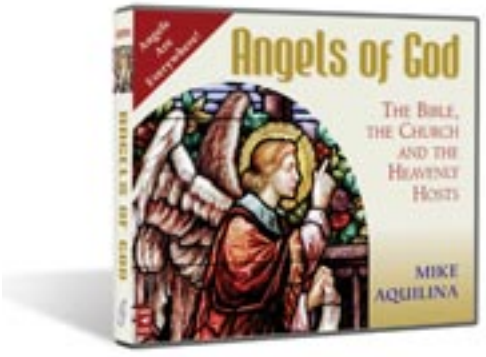
MARK HART leads conferences, retreats, and missions for teens and adults around the world. He is vice president of LIFE TEEN International, a Catholic youth ministry, and is the author of *Ask the Bible Geek®: Answers to Questions From Catholic Teens* and *Ask the Bible Geek® 2: More Answers to Questions from Catholic Teens* (Servant Books). Mark and his wife, Melanie, have three daughters and live in Phoenix, Arizona.



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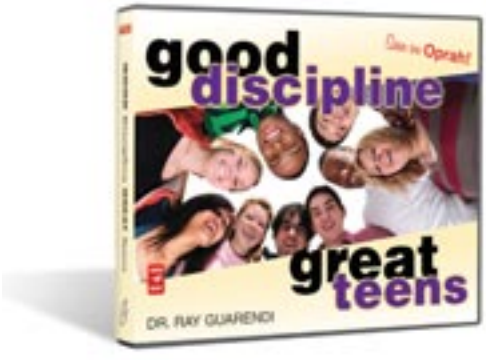

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RAYMOND N. GUARENDI, PH.D., is a clinical psychologist and the father of ten children. He has been a regular guest on national TV and radio programs such as *Oprah, Joan Rivers, The 700 Club*, and *CBS This Morning* and produces a syndicated advice column and national radio program, *The Doctor Is In*. "Dr. Ray" is the author of several books, including *Discipline That Lasts a Lifetime* (Servant Books).

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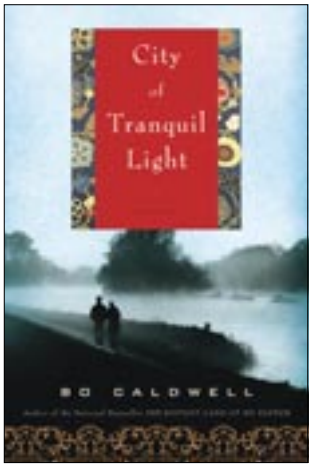
KELLY CHERRY

WITH GOD IN CHINA

CITY OF TRANQUIL LIGHT
A Novel

By Bo Caldwell
Henry Holt and Company. 304p $25

A novel about goodness has become an uncommon event in contemporary America. Novels about faith are plentiful, and some readers may prefer to think of Bo Caldwell's second effort—following *The Distant Land of My Father*, a bestseller—as a book about faith. A young man and woman, Mennonites, meet when they are recruited as missionaries to China. It is 1906. They will live in China for 27 years, their faith supporting them in poverty, drought, flood and famine, miseries perpetrated on the people by bandits and warlords, the cruelties of Chiang Kai-shek's revolution, and personal loss and despair. They feel the presence of God in their lives, long to help others feel it, and it is to God they turn in suffering and also in happiness. Perhaps faith is the better term. But I prefer to think of it as a study of goodness.



Will Kiehn and his future wife, Katherine Friesen, are so well versed in their faith that only occasionally, and only in extremity, is there any temptation to turn away. Goodness, though, requires self-discipline, the daily decision to do the right thing, a backbone, hard work, and moral and sometimes physical courage. Will and Katherine have these qualities in abundance.

Their story is voiced by both of them, Will from a long time after the events and Katherine in her contemporaneous diary. Katherine's sections are italicized; Will's are not. As the book begins it is not always easy to keep them straight despite the typography. Will does not sound like a woman, exactly, but his voice is neutered and the reader has to remind herself that it is not Katherine who is speaking. This difficulty dissolves as they take up their work in China. Describing his activities, which are manly, Will's voice becomes masculine.

Both are beautifully realized. Good as they are, filled with love as they are, they are also believable, this intense wife and her devoted husband and the ways in which they care for each other, take care of each other. The respect and love between this couple and Katherine's sister and brother-in-law and their children are equally evident, and each couple is a model for the other. Indeed, mission work seems to a significant degree to be a kind of teaching by example, missionaries modeling a theology of love for a community in need. For most of their time in China, Will and Katherine's community is Kuang P'ing Ch'eng, the City of Tranquil Light.

Details of Chinese life are fascinating, even arresting. There are the drowning pools, in which "unwanted infants, usually girls," are murdered; opium dens, where men lie on wood pallets, lost in separate and unreal worlds; a bandit who wraps around his waist "a woman's brassiere, which he was using as a sort of two-compartment coin purse." The bandit with a bra/coin purse is perhaps unique, but "half-cooked pig tripe," dog meat and "kaoliang cake stuffed with boiled scorpions minus their stingers and shells" were not. During the 1920 famine "*anyone can buy a girl for three dollars*." At the same time, Caldwell acquaints us with a large cast of Chinese characters who live and breathe on the page, and Will and Katherine's deep affection for these friends is as palpable as the characters themselves, who walk right into the reader's room. Among them are Chung Hao and his wife, Mo Yun, who become their very dear friends and help advance the missionary work. The magistrate meets unspeakable violence with unspeakable violence yet recognizes Will and Katherine's goodness; he and his foot-bound wife, Feng Chen Mei, come to admire the work they are doing. Lao Chang, a gateman, gives his life to save Will and Katherine. Hsiao Lao, a bandit chieftain, undergoes a complex but completely credible transformation after Will treats a knife gash on his son's face.

There are many passages of wisdom, and again it is cogent wisdom.

Will and Katherine accept that God is a mystery who cannot be fully comprehended. Even an atheist, with a little juggling, might agree with that. "*I believe I could write a book about the goodness of God*," Katherine says, perhaps speaking for the author as well as herself; and Will admits, "I have come to accept that at present I have only a partial view of reality; . . . I know that my Lord is the God of wheat fields and oak trees, of mountains and valleys, and that His answers, like His works, often require time." In late life, Will opens Katherine's Bible to discover a handwritten note:

> *We often wait for God with hope. But sometimes we must wait for hope. We may feel nothing, but we do not rely on our feelings. When we don't feel hope, we wait for it, and it always comes.* (italics hers)

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City of Tranquil Light was inspired by Caldwell's maternal grandparents, but this is no hagiography, nor is it sentimentalized. The candid account of constant struggle and hardship, internal as well as external, eliminates any possibility of hagiography or sentimentalism. I say "inspired" deliberately because it is inspired, a beautifully written, often riveting, heartbreaking, heart-healing, wise and sweet-tempered novel.

KELLY CHERRY'*s most recent books are* Girl in a Library: On Women Writers & the Writing Life *and* The Retreats of Thought: Poems.

GEORGE W. HUNT

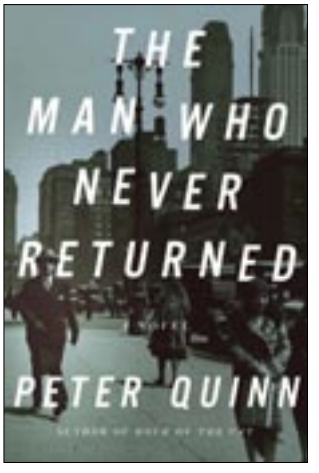
DISAPPEARING ACT

THE MAN WHO NEVER RETURNED
A Novel

By Peter Quinn
Overlook. 352p $24.95

For people of a certain age, this book's title might evoke expectations about the famous Charlie, celebrated in the Kingston Trio song of the late 1950s, who was condemned to "ride forever 'neath the streets of Boston" because he had no subway exit fare on the M.T.A. Instead, it refers to the far more famous Judge Joseph Force Crater, newly appointed to the New York State Supreme Court, who suddenly vanished after entering a taxi on New York City's West side on the evening of Aug. 6, 1930.

The disappearance of Judge Crater (like that of Amelia Earhart a few years later) fascinated the nation at the time, and an endless offering of rumors, speculations and theories filled the tabloid newspapers. Sightings of Judge Crater were reported countrywide (on bread lines in Chicago or Detroit, in Hooverville shacks in Seattle, on farms in Nebraska), and many a corpse was exhumed on a knowing but false tip. Franklin D. Roosevelt (then New York's governor) was behind the disappearance, or else the mob or a jealous husband or perhaps rival politicians or the New York Police Department. For decades later, until as recently as 1980, on each five-year anniversary, some newspaper somewhere in the United States would resuscitate the story under the familiar banner, "Where Is Judge Crater?"



Peter Quinn has masterfully revived the mystery of Judge Crater and the atmospherics of the Depression-era 1930s and interwoven them with clever revivals of film noir-like characters and suspense, layering mystery upon mystery in enthralling fashion. His central character, Fintan Dunne, is an Irish reincarnation of a Humphrey Bogart-like, somewhat noble but ever-skeptical Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe. The year is 1955 and Dunne, who first appeared as a New York detective in Quinn's fine thriller *Hour of the Cat* (2005), is now retired in Florida after a career in the Office of Strategic Services in World War II and as a private investigator. Though reasonably content in retirement, he is gradually lured back into the investigative game by ex-O.S.S. pals when, to his surprise, he is offered a considerable fee if he can solve the 25-year-old mystery of Judge Crater. The offer comes from the newspaper tycoon Walter Wilkes, monomaniacal dispenser of sleaze journalism, who plans to have Dunne's solving of the Crater mystery coincide with the launching of his new glossy magazine, Snap, and that of a third television network on the Aug. 6 anniversary.

The reader thereafter accompanies Dunne on his quest, a Dantesque descent into the past (the hellish world of Gotham in the early 1930s), wedding history and mystery—Quinn's novelistic strengths—and the equally baffling present of 1955 with its distorted memories and updated resentments. Everything grows curiouser and curiouser as Dunne visits the over- and underworld of a marvelous

cast of characters: elusive ex-cops, bitter former showgirls, a still-aggrieved widow, a nasty coroner, a shrewd and helpful nurse and several reluctant witnesses from long ago. Throughout, the dialogue is witty and pointed, never self-consciously cute, while ever so subtly the clues mount into coherence and readerly satisfaction.

Quinn is an unobtrusive but sure-handed guide. The chronological narrative is artfully balanced and buttressed by clever insertions of seemingly verbatim excerpts that consist of "reprints" from various magazines, newspaper articles, interviews and books. These inserts are, like the story itself, history re-imagined and contribute another layer to this novel's pleasures. They are then reinforced by pertinent quotations from the Gideon Bible Dunne peruses, notably one citation from Ecclesiastes that captures succinctly the novel's theme: "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." In this novel, God does so.

GEORGE W. HUNT, S.J., *former editor-in-chief of* ***America****, is director of the Archbishop Hughes Institute at Fordham University in New York.*

ROBERT F. WALCH

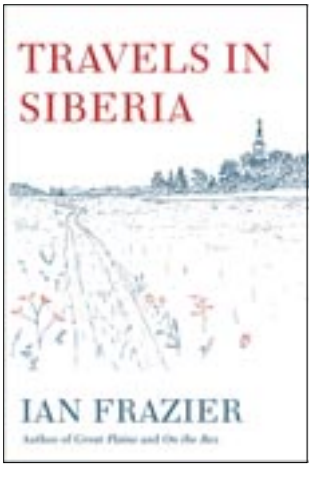
A GRIM, VAST EXPANSE

TRAVELS IN SIBERIA
By Ian Frazier
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 544 p $30

Like someone sampling hot bath water, Ian Frazier eases himself into making the full commitment that writing a book about Siberia would demand. First, he dips his toe into the vast subject by reading a few Siberian travel adventures. Then he takes two short trips to Siberia, one to Provideniya on the Chukotka Peninsula and the other to the Diomede Islands in the Bering Strait. Now acclimated to his topic, more reading follows, along with Russian language study and a trip to St. Petersburg.

A monumental undertaking from the author's standpoint, once he was fully committed to writing this travel memoir, it took the New Jersey resident 16 years to complete his research, make the actual journeys and then write everything up. Over that period Frazier visited Siberia five times and made an equal number of trips to western Russia.

Since three-fourths of Russia and one-twelfth of all the land on earth is covered by Siberia, there was little chance he would see it all. That was never Frazier's intent, but he did want to have as authentic and representative an experience as possible as he visited cities and villages and sampled Siberia's natural wonders, from Lake Baikal and the Ural Mountains to the Pacific coastal area.



Frazier takes great pains not only to chronicle his adventures on the road but also to share what he has learned about Siberian history, the topography, climate conditions and cultural background of the vast region.

Whether it is describing permafrost, delving into the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway or discussing the lives of famous people exiled in Siberia, Frazier manages to share his newly acquired knowledge without being pedantic. There are, however, a few instances where he slips into lecture mode.

The author's enthusiasm for the Decembrists is a case in point. (The Decemberists were the rebel Russian army officers and soldiers who launched the unsuccessful revolt against Nicholas I's ascension to the throne in December 1825.) Since he considers them the greatest generation in Russian history, Frazier spends about 14 pages making his case. Fortunately for the reader, this sort of thing doesn't happen often.

After nibbling around the edges of his topic in the opening 147 pages of the book, the author finally makes the decision to cross Siberia. "I had flown into it and out again, and that was okay," he writes. "But as I read more and studied the journeys of previous travelers, I understood that Siberia belongs to the category of things (oceans, deserts) that must be crossed, just as mountains are to be climbed."

Eventually, a third of the way into the narrative, the author climbs into a used Renault van with his two guides, Sergei Mikhailovich Lunev and Vladimir Chumak, to begin his grand exploration of Siberia. This five-week adventure, which would take Frazier from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean, began in August 2001, and was funded by a $22,000 advance from The New Yorker magazine.

This was the first of two journeys on which Sergei, a moonlighting college professor from St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University, would accompany Frazier. Although they got along fairly well, the stress of coping with their vehicle's constant mechanical issues and having to deal with difficult driving conditions placed a strain on the relationship.

Also, a source of continual conflict was Sergei's reluctance to stop at aban-

doned prison camps and let Frazier satisfy his curiosity about these vestiges of the past. On their second trip together, this problem was resolved and the author got his fill of the deserted compounds.

Although he is admittedly infatuated with Russia and all things Siberian, Frazier does not gloss over the negatives. He is not reluctant to mention his encounters with disgusting restrooms, piles of roadside trash, unpalatable food, monstrous mosquitoes and days so frigid the ink in his pen tip froze.

Overall, *Travels in Siberia* is an entertaining read. There are no photos, but the author includes some of the sketches he made while traveling. The reader will probably not mind Frazier's short digressions on such diverse subjects as mammoth ivory, satellite collisions and the largely defunct Bering Strait Tunnel and Railroad Group.

The book's primary shortcoming lies in the author's sometimes awkward transitions. Occasionally, for example, Frazier takes the easy way out and will introduce a lengthy quoted passage with, "Here's what he said."

Or he injects comments on the things he did to amuse himself while visiting Novosibirsk. "Things to do in Novosibirsk:" doesn't strike this reader as a very clever way of moving from a discussion of the collision of Iridium 33 and Cosmos 2251 over Siberia in 2009 to what the author saw in this city of a million-and-a-half residents.

Armchair travelers will appreciate the time and effort Frazier devoted to this project. While he delivers a satisfying and enjoyable narrative, it is doubtful that many of his readers will be inspired to follow in his footsteps the way he himself followed in the path recounted by writer-explorer George Kennan in *Tent Life in Siberia: An Incredible Account of Siberian Adventure, Travel, and Survival.*

I, however, prefer to experience the rigors of Siberian travel secondhand.

ROBERT F. WALCH, *a regular reviewer for Bookloons.com and Bookideas.com, is a retired English instructor after 30 years in secondary education.*

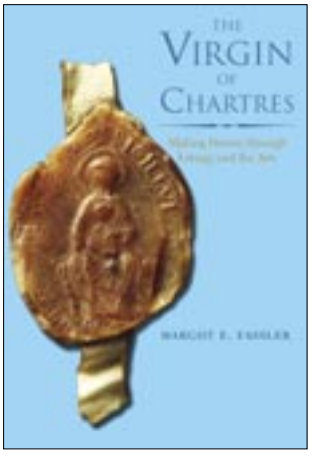
FRANCO MORMANDO

MARY'S PLACE

THE VIRGIN OF CHARTRES

Making History Through Liturgy and the Arts

By Margot E. Fassler
Yale Univ. Press. 632p $55



The 12th-century cathedral of Chartres truly is one of the world's great wonders, not only as a magnificent specimen of Gothic architecture but also for the sheer spiritual energy it emanates, a sense of the holy that transcends time, space and creed. Its appeal cuts across the barriers of history and cultures, which in part explains its designation as a Unesco World Heritage site. I first visited Chartres 35 years ago as a studious undergraduate French major and aspiring medievalist. Intending to study the entire town and its environs, I spent most of the nine hours of my available time inside the cathedral itself, absorbing its contents and observing the ever-changing effects of the light streaming in from the stained glass.

The fame and fortune of Chartres is linked to a relic of the Virgin Mary, the *Sancta Camisia*, the Holy Tunic or Robe. A gift to the church supposedly by Charlemagne himself, it was believed to be the very dress worn by Mary at the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus. Chartres also owed its popularity to another, even more famous Marian relic, strangely and completely ignored in this book: the milk of the Virgin.

Though the Marian cult at Chartres can be traced back to at least the eighth century, it was only in the 11th century that it began to flourish. This was the result of a deliberate publicity campaign initiated by one of the Virgin's most ardent devotés, Bishop Fulbert (reigned 1006-28). In 1020, on the eve of the feast of Mary's Nativity (Sept. 8), a fire erupted that consumed most of the

town, including its cathedral. The rebuilding of the cathedral was immediately undertaken and finished rather quickly, in 1037. (The present structure represents a later reconstruction following the equally devastating fire of 1194.) At the same time, inspired by the timing of the fire, Fulbert decided to launch a distinctive new image for both town and Virgin by promoting what was one of the lesser Marian feasts, that of Mary's own birth. In undertaking this campaign, Fulbert may have also been expressing his gratitude to Mary for his miraculous healing. According to the universally believed report of the respectable chronicler-monk William of Malmesbury (d. 1143), Mary had cured Fulbert of some dread illness by bathing his face with milk from her breast, drops of which he dutifully gathered and preserved as a relic for his cathedral (but, again, no mention of any of this in Fassler's book).

As Fassler explains in her major new study of Chartres:

> The elevation of the feast of Mary's Nativity required a remaking of the past on several fronts. If Mary was to have a birth, then she had to have parents and a set of historical events to indicate the nature of her royal lineage. Mary's nativity is not described in the Bible, but it required scriptural texts for its foundations.

The historical "data" and scriptural correlations were duly assembled by Fulbert. They were, of course, medieval fantasies, but Fulbert's eloquence on behalf of Mary, in the form of sermons and liturgical texts, captured the imagination of the faithful and the approbation of ecclesiastical authorities. Reinforced by the efforts of his successors, Fulbert's campaign was a complete success. The cathedral of Chartres as we know and love it today is ultimately the miracle that Fulbert wrought.

The scholarly core and unique contribution of Fassler's monumental book is a meticulously detailed study of the development and dynamics of this Fulbertian phenomenon of the feast of Mary's Nativity through close reading of the materials that created it: above all, the sermons and liturgical texts (chants, responsories, antiphons). In paying attention to these neglected sources of Chartres's history, Fassler was motivated, and rightly so, by the conviction that in the centuries before widespread literacy, "[m]ost people learned about the past in what they heard and saw and reenacted [in public rituals and ceremony], not in what they read." For medieval Christians, much of what they understood about history came from the liturgy, including liturgical music. Note that Fassler is professor of music history at Yale and this volume was financed in part by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music; hence, musicology looms large here. (There is, accordingly and understandably, no discussion of Mariolatry—the disturbing excesses of Marian devotion—or of the relevance of the material examined for today's spirituality.)

The Virgin of Chartres will appeal not only to medievalists and liturgists but to a general readership as well. Do not be daunted by the scholarly apparatus of this weighty tome. Alongside the academic discussions, you will find in easily accessible, pleasurably readable form much of the history, iconography, folklore and nitty-gritty politics surrounding "the Virgin of Chartres." There are, furthermore, over 100 high-quality black-and-white photographs and 16 excellent color reproductions, a guide to the identification of the statues on the cathedral's exterior and engaging excerpts from delightful medieval tales and chronicles. If you are a lover of Chartres—and who is not a lover of Chartres even after visiting only once?—there is much in this masterful and wonderfully interdisciplinary new study to inform, delight and illuminate.

FRANCO MORMANDO, *associate professor of Romance Languages and Literatures at Boston College, specializes in the history of popular preaching and religion.*

WITHOUT GUILE

CARTOON BY BOB ECKSTEIN

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KENRICK-GLENNON SEMINARY RECTOR PRESIDENT. The Archdiocese of Saint Louis has an immediate need for a full-time Rector President for Kenrick-Glennon Seminary. The candidate who is selected will assume responsibilities July 1, 2011. Founded in 1893, today K.G.S. has a student body of 126 seminarians, after ordaining one of the largest classes in the United States in 2010. The Rector President must be a priest in good standing with an advanced degree in theology or canon law. This is a full-time position and demands someone who has the ability to form a seminary community as outlined in the *Program of Priestly Formation* (fifth edition). Send applications to: Archbishop Robert J. Carlson, Archbishop of Saint Louis, 20 Archbishop May Drive, Saint Louis, MO 63119-5738.

PRESIDENT, FRANCISCAN SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY, a Roman Catholic seminary and graduate school of theology operated by the Province of St. Barbara, Order of Friars Minor, and a member school of the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Calif. The Franciscan School of Theology seeks an experienced academic leader and administrator with a proven record of institutional advancement and relevant Ph.D. or equivalent. Applicants must support the Franciscan theological tradition/educational mission and the ecumenical mission of the Graduate Theological Union. Preference will be given to a vowed religious member of the Franciscan family or other vowed religious who has demonstrated commitment to and understanding of the Franciscan vision. For complete description, see www.fst.edu. By Nov. 15, 2010, applicants should send letter of application, C.V. and three references to: Chair, Presidential Search Committee, Franciscan School of Theology, 1712 Euclid Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709; e-mail: presidentialsearchFST@fst.edu.

THE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON seeks to hire a Chair of the Department of Religious Studies. Applicants must have an academic record of excellence in teaching and scholarship suitable for appointment with tenure at the rank of associate professor or (preferably) professor. The position requires commitment to the university's Catholic and Marianist mission, to the department's central role of stewardship of that mission, and to the department's multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to religious studies.

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ate level plays a central role in the common academic program while also having a strong undergraduate major, and which at the graduate level has master's programs in theological studies and pastoral ministry, as well as a Ph.D. program in theology that emphasizes a U.S. Catholic context (see www.udayton.edu/~relstudy). Preference will be given to those with a demonstrated ability to oversee curriculum development, to lead effectively and collaboratively, to serve as an influential voice inside and outside the university, and to teach and advise students from diverse backgrounds.

Deadline: A complete application for the position consists of a letter of intent, C.V. and the names of three references. Review of applications will begin on Nov. 1, 2010, and continue until the position is filled. Apply online at: http://jobs.udayton.edu. For further information, contact Prof. William Portier, Chair, Religious Studies Search Committee at William.portier@notes.udayton.edu.

The University of Dayton, a comprehensive Catholic university founded by the Society of Mary (the Marianists) in 1850, is Ohio's largest independent university and one of the nation's 10 largest Catholic universities. The University of Dayton is firmly committed to the principle of diversity and is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer. Persons of color, women, individuals with disabilities and veterans are encouraged to apply. "You Can Light Your Tomorrow by the Way You Live Today," Elizabeth Browning.

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Retreats

WISDOM HOUSE, Litchfield, Conn. Labyrinth walks are open during the month. Interfaith Institute, "Money and Faith," Oct. 29-30: Speakers include Margaret McCarthy, Barbara Cohen, Rev. Terry Wysong and Mufti Ikram ul Haq. For other retreats and programs, visit www.wisdomhouse.org, or call (860) 567-3163.

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LETTERS

Shortsighted

Your comment "The Real Islam" (8/30) is shortsighted. The real Islam is either powerless—or unwilling—to take down the death squads and training centers of terrorists in their midst. These terrorists are knocking down our gates in the name of God on every front, hitting the heart of countries like Britain and Spain, as they repeatedly hit us, bankrupting our country. Plane travel used to be a pleasure; now, because of Muslim hatred, it is a costly pain. Nobody mentions the flood of Christian refugees we are taking in from Muslim countries that for centuries had been Christian before the Muslims took over. These families are literally fleeing for their lives.

The United States should close all mosques on our soil until the worshippers prevail on their Muslim countries of origin to stop fiendish bomb-training camps and then show the same courtesy and open arms that the United States has extended to Muslim faithful here.

M. E. CARSON
Seattle, Wash.

Don't Blame the Church

The column "How Will They Know?" by John F. Kavanaugh, S.J. (9/20), misses the point. In the world of American Catholics in the upper fringe, especially if they are associated with the academic world, people trying to explain the woes facing the church look almost entirely to the inside.

People are leaving the church because in a world of extraordinary wealth, people don't need people the way they did in the past. They leave for the same reasons that families do not form in the numbers they had before. Family commitment interferes with self-fulfillment. The pope knows this. Remarkably, many U.S. Catholic leaders seem not to.

This also makes Father Kavanaugh a bad historian. The church faced the real blow of our era during the 1970s, and it had nothing to do with ordaining women. The dialogue between the church and the outside world and the dialogue within the church has kept the church alive for 2,000 years. It's crazy not to see that portraying the structure of the church as the problem rather than the solution will only weaken it in face of the secular wind that faces Christianity in the United States.

ERIC BERGERUD
Albany, N.Y.

An Inconsistent Position

Our secretary of state and president disagree with your editorial "Hold to the Deadline" (9/13) and your suggestion that leaving Afghanistan will have no impact. It is "delusional" to think that our presence does not discourage Al Qaeda and the Taliban from recreating what they once had as an operational base. Coherent arguments can be made for both leaving and staying. But it makes no sense to argue that we should continue taking casualties and tell the enemy the date when we will

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throw in the towel, which is the "compromise" our president agreed to.

I also detect an elitist antimilitary disdain alluding to our military's "can do" attitude. Would **America** prefer a "can't do" attitude? What is **America**'s position if the president and General Petraeus see significant progress toward a successful resolution? Would **America** then support extending the mission? If not, **America** should not be calling for a future withdrawal but should demand that our troops withdraw immediately and save needless waste of lives and resources.

WALTER MATTINGLY
Jacksonville, Fla.

We Can't Do It

Concerning your editorial on Afghanistan (9/13), I could not agree more with your estimate of the situation (an old military term). We seem to be constantly tumbling into these peripheral wars or conflicts, where we invariably wind up trying to "fix" the benighted inhabitants by trying to make them into Americans and their leaders into Thomas Jeffersons. Cultures cannot be changed overnight or by fiat, even by the United States and its can-do spirit. Once we exorcise that "demonic" spirit from our mind-set, the United States and the world will be much better off.

JOHN D. FITZMORRIS JR.
New Orleans, La.

Slipping Behind

Bravo, Archbishop Timothy Dolan, for "The Catholic Schools We Need" (9/13). My diocese, Rochester, is a perfect example of what can happen when Catholic schools have little or no priority with the administration. In 1988 we had 39 Catholic elementary schools serving just over 16,000 children in Monroe County, our population center. The county is now down to 11 schools with an enrollment of 3,446. So it is no surprise that weekend Mass attendance in the diocese has fallen by over 25 percent in the last

10 years and our ordination rate is essentially zero. As the archbishop says, the entire church suffers when Catholic schools disappear.

MIKE SHEA
Rochester, N.Y.

"Kumbayah" Is Not Enough

Robert Brancatelli's "Liberating Catechesis" (9/13) reminds me of Supertramp's 1979 song, "The Logical Song." Does he really know who, where or when he is? We should not lament that the church is raising the bar for catechesis where our Protestant brethren are setting uniform standards. A solid parish-based program will provide age-appropriate treatment of Catholic dogma and still leave room for Brancatelli's kerygma.

One cannot hope to empower future lay ministers and/or future vocations to the priesthood or religious life with anemic "homespun" formation. One cannot hope to open the minds of young Catholics to Augustine or Merton when all there is to work with is "Kumbayah." The parent who couldn't distinguish between "confirmation" and "ordination" would not exist if we restored the order of the initiation sacraments on a nationwide level. "Oh, you'll never get youth in the door," some argue. But our Protestant friends, who have no similar sacraments, have youth groups bursting at the seams.

PAUL STOKELL
Oklahoma City, Okla.

Don't Go

Thank you for the column by John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., "How Will They Know?" (9/13). As a woman who has considered leaving the church, I will continue to pray and hope that change will come, but after 70 years it would indeed break my heart to leave.

JOAN O'BRIANT
Aiken, S.C.

Rap/Rock Pope?

In the context of your ongoing discus-

sion of church music ("Sing a New Song," 9/13), I am baffled by the decision of church authorities in England and Wales to have a rap song serve as the youth anthem during the papal visit to the United Kingdom this month.

Pope Benedict XVI has previously described pop music as the "cult of the banal." He has also stated that rock music is "a form of worship…in opposition to Christian worship."

Rap music has a beat with a downward deflection that is condescending in nature. It contains essential rhythmic elements of bragging (braggadocio), ritualized insult and toasting oneself. Rap was largely influenced by rock and roll (slang for sex) and has developed into trends of violence and gratuitous sex. Putting Christian lyrics to such profane music does not make the music "Christian." Plain and simply, this is inculturation gone haywire.

PAUL KOKOSKI
Hamilton, Ontario

Newman Speaks For Today

Readers of the Rev. James J. Bacik's "Habits of Mind and Spirit" (9/13) and students at Newman Centers will appreciate the frankness of their blessed patron voicing an opinion with recent overtones. Newman's opinion was reported recently by the Rev. John J. Hughes in Inside the Vatican (August–September 2010). Commenting on the pastoral letter Cardinal Henry Edward Manning issued after the First Vatican Council, implying that the pope's infallibility was unlimited, Newman wrote: "We have come to a climax of a tyranny. It is not good for a Pope to live 20 years. It is an anomaly and bears no good fruit: he becomes a god, has no one to contradict him, does not know facts, and does cruel things without meaning it." Pius IX's pontificate (1846-78) had almost eight years to run when Newman penned those lines.

LARRY N. LORENZONI, S.D.B.
San Francisco, Calif.

Saving Gratitude

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), OCT. 10, 2010

Readings: 2 Kgs 5:14-17; Ps 98:1-4; 2 Tm 2:8-13; Lk 17:11-19

"One of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice" (Lk 17:15)

One of our sisters, as she approached her golden jubilee, was repeatedly heard to say, "I have all I need." She had always lived very simply, and her stance of radical gratitude was infectious as she invited all whom she encountered to join her in this thankful space.

The first reading and the Gospel today tell stories of two different men afflicted with leprosy. One was a mighty warrior, commander of the army of the king of Aram. The other is huddled with a pitiful group of nine others likewise afflicted. The first, called Naaman, has easy access to the king. The one in the Gospel is nameless and is ostracized by all, keeping his distance even from Jesus. Both are foreigners who nonetheless are healed by Israel's prophets, Elisha and Jesus. Both praise the God of Israel for their transformation.

In the Gospel account, the focus is on the way the one healed man turns around and loudly glorifies God, falling at Jesus' feet, thanking him. It is a dramatic enactment of the stance of saving gratitude that divine gifts evoke. Jesus affirms the man's response and tells him to go, that his faith has saved him. Luke does not elaborate what was the man's inner disposition before he was healed. Was he filled with self-pity? Was he consumed with longing for well-being? Was he bitter or despairing over his deteriorating physical state?

At the realization of his healing, the man turned around, perhaps not only physically, but interiorly as well. When he lets gratitude for all God has given him consume him, he turns around from any other ailments that eat at his spirit. Jesus affirms that this kind of faith, rooted in thankfulness, is the healing, saving power (the Greek verb *sozein* connotes both "heal" and "save") that enables him to go forward as a changed person, both in body and spirit.

In the first reading, Naaman has a much more difficult time accepting the full transformation offered him. In the verses leading up to today's Lectionary selection, Naaman takes huge amounts of silver, gold and clothing, along with a letter from his king, when he approaches the king of Israel to ask for healing from the foreign prophet. He then goes to Elisha's house with horses, chariots and all his retinue.

Elisha sends out a messenger, who directs Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman is furious, declaring, "I thought for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord, his God, and would wave his hand over the spot and cure the leprosy!" (1 Kgs 5:11).

Because of his high position, Naaman feels entitled to special, personal attention. He is used to giving commands and has a fixed idea of how the healing should be done. And although he has crossed over into Israelite territory, he has no regard for its life-giving water. He insists that the rivers in his own land are better than the Jordan. After he departs in a rage, his servants persuade him to go back and immerse himself in the Jordan.

Naaman struggles mightily to turn away from his stance of entitlement, from his attempts to buy healing and to direct the manner in which it should occur. After his healing, Naaman still tries to pay for it, but Elisha will take nothing from him. All that God or Jesus desires in return is a heart shaped by saving gratitude for freely given grace that has the power to heal both the inner and outer self.

BARBARA E. REID

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Pray to be filled with gratitude, which displaces greed and entitlement.
- How is gratitude to God a saving grace that is different from a groveling dependence?
- How can your stance of fundamental gratitude be a transforming power in the cosmos?

ART: TAD DUNNE

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