

# America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

OCT. 11, 2010 \$3.50

## Christians in the Middle East

DIALOGUE, REFUGEES AND PEACE



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**T**he beatification of John Henry Newman by Pope Benedict XVI on Sept. 19 in Birmingham, England, brought particular consolation to Catholics in the English-speaking world. From the time of Newman's death, even fellow Britons who did not share his Catholic faith judged him worthy of canonization. An editorial in the Times of London the day after he died reflected on the popular belief in his holiness. It read: "Of one thing we may be sure, that the memory of his pure, noble life, untouched by worldliness, unsoured by any trace of fanaticism, will endure, and that whether Rome canonizes him or not, he will be canonized in the thoughts of pious people of many creeds in England."

The process of canonizing a saint, as the late Vincent Ferrer Blehl, S.J., wrote in *America* more than 20 years ago (3/11/89), "begins with the faithful and their relationship to the potential saint. Certain of God's faithful become attracted by the personality and heroism of another person, and in their esteem for that person they experience a desire to experience that particular way to holiness." The hierarchy, he added, "cannot ignore a devotion that, if authentic, has its origins in the action of God in human hearts."

Father Blehl went on to explain that in the early stages of the process, the testimony to a saint's holiness is basic to the preparation of a candidate's cause. Newman's file contained 18,000 pages of testimony. The search for testimony began, according to Blehl's obituary in the British newspaper *The Independent* (11/6/01), with an article in *America* by Charles J. Callan, O.P., in November 1941 that canvassed opinions about Newman's sanctity. "The response," *The Independent* reported, "was overwhelming." Nonetheless, it took nearly another 40 years for the process to get moving.

In 1959, during a visit to England,

Father Blehl discovered that those responsible for promoting Newman's cause were not following the appropriate procedures. Using his Jesuit contacts in Rome, Father Blehl helped set the work on the right course, but still it languished for another 20 years. Blehl had hoped to be appointed to the historical commission for Newman's cause, but his Jesuit superiors assigned him instead to a succession of teaching positions back in the United States.

In 1979 the Archdiocese of Birmingham was making yet another start. "Full of enthusiasm" for the cause, *The Independent* reports, Father Blehl sought early retirement from Fordham University so he could devote himself full time to Cardinal Newman's canonization. Birmingham's archbishop named him chairman of the historical commission, and subsequently he became postulator of the cause.

In 1989 the case for Newman's sainthood was completed, and in 1991 Pope John Paul II issued a decree declaring the cardinal's heroic virtue and naming him "venerable." In 2008 the Congregation of Saints accepted as a miracle the cure of Jack Sullivan, a permanent deacon in Boston, of a crippling spinal disorder. This fulfilled another of the requirements for Newman's beatification. Miracles, Blehl had written, are confirmation of the holiness people of faith have already witnessed. Regrettably, Blehl did not live to see this miracle approved or Newman beatified. He died in 2001.

Pope Paul VI once whispered to the French Academician and theologian Jean Guitton: "Be consoled. One day Newman will be declared a doctor of the church."

"When that day surely arrives" and Newman is named a saint and doctor of the church, the author of Father Blehl's obituary wrote, "nobody should forget that it was Vincent Blehl more than anybody who made it possible."

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*Cover:* Catholics offer prayers for peace in Iraq, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon during a special Mass in Amman, Jordan, in 2007. Photo: CNS/Ali Jarekji, Reuters

# CONTENTS



## CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

- 11 CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS TOGETHER**  
Interreligious relations and the synod on the Middle East  
*Elias D. Mallon*
- 15 REMEMBER THE EXILES**  
The problem of refugees facing the churches of the Middle East  
*Joseph Cornelius Donnelly and Drew Christiansen*
- 20 THE CHRISTIAN STAKE IN MIDEAST PEACE**  
A proposal for the protection of a minority  
*William H. Keeler*



## COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Current Comment**
- 5 Editorial** Israel's Choice
- 6 Signs of the Times**
- 9 Column** Still Points  
*Margaret Silf*
- 29 Letters**
- 31 The Word** Persistent Pursuit of Justice  
*Barbara E. Reid*

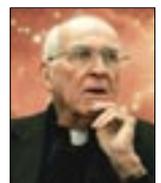


## BOOKS & CULTURE

- 22 TELEVISION** PBS's new series "God in America" **BOOKS** *The Circle Dance of Time; Dreyfus*

## ON THE WEB

George V. Coyne, S.J., right, discusses the work of the **Vatican Observatory** on our podcast, and Jon Sweeney examines the tradition of  **blessing animals**. Plus, a slideshow on **Christian life** in the Middle East. All at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).



### Reform Begins at Last

If the views of registered voters nationwide are accurately reflected in a New York Times/CBS poll conducted in September, then nearly half (49 percent) strongly or somewhat disapprove of the new health care bill. Other polls report even higher disapproval. Apparently neither the Obama administration nor health care reform advocates have been able to sell the American people on the merits of the reform. Surely the built-in delays in implementing the law have hindered advocates from making their case, for the law and its benefits have seemed more theoretical than real.

Finally, in September, some reform measures took effect. It is now illegal for insurers to deny health coverage to applicants with a pre-existing condition, for example, or to deny a customer's claim for payment on the basis of an error made on the insurance application. Now insurers must allow customers to purchase coverage for their uninsured children up to age 26, a gain for unemployed young adults. Tax credits are available for qualifying small businesses to help them offer employees affordable plans. And the law prohibits insurers from gouging small employers by charging them much more (one executive reported an example of "18 percent more") than they charge large businesses for the same coverage.

The law does not fully take effect until 2014, yet opponents' efforts to repeal and diminish it have been under way since the bill was signed. At issue is whether voters' experience of some benefits of the law now can build enough support to forestall its repeal or evisceration. If not, the health benefits lost will be more real than theoretical.

### Deporting Roma People

France's decision to expel Roma people (Gypsies) and bulldoze their encampments has drawn sharp criticism from human rights groups, the European Union and the Vatican. Roma represent the largest ethnic group in Eastern Europe, with almost three million in Romania and Bulgaria. Because both countries are now members of the European Union, Roma people can migrate without visas to wealthier countries.

Funds to assist Roma people are available through the European Union's social fund. Critics of the Sarkozy government's deportation policy (over 1,700 Roma have been expelled since July), like the European Union's justice commissioner, Viviane Reding, have claimed that this money is not being used to help them. She caused an outcry in

France by calling the deportations ethnic cleansing and comparing them with World War II Nazi roundups of Roma and Jews. She later apologized for the comment.

In contrast to France's negative policies toward Roma, Spain, with approximately one million Roma, has invested in education to promote their successful integration. Most of its Roma are literate and have access to public housing and financial aid, provided they send their children to school and health care facilities. Despite many years of victimization, they have become part of Spanish mainstream culture. But much effort will be needed to persuade other countries, like France and Italy, that expulsions are not a solution. They painfully reflect a discriminatory attitude toward a marginalized population that has been deprived of its dignity for far too long. Funds through the European Union are available and should be used to help integrate Roma residents.

### Hidden From the World

Did you know that Eileen Mary Nearne was a war hero? Neither did her neighbors. The soft-spoken 89-year-old woman died recently in her home in Torquay, England. That her body went undiscovered for several days and that she was being slated for a "council burial" (pauper's grave) indicate the hiddenness of her life. And what a life it was. The French government awarded Miss Nearne the Croix de Guerre for her courageous actions during World War II. She helped operate a secret radio from Paris that facilitated weapons drops to the French Resistance, paving the way for D-Day. When she was captured by the Gestapo, the young woman was sent to the Ravensbruck camp, where she was tortured. After being moved to another camp, she escaped and linked up with American troops. It is a story that begs to be made into a novel, or at least a movie.

Not many of our friends or neighbors live lives out of a John le Carré novel. But Miss Nearne's death and near anonymity in her neighborhood (one obituary noted that she was known mainly for her love of cats) show how little people often know about the quiet heroism of one another. A co-worker may be caring for an elderly parent, quietly. A neighbor might volunteer at her church, stocking the shelves of a food pantry, silently. The hidden quality of these actions somehow lends them greater dignity, since they are done with no expectation of public adulation. As Henri Nouwen once said, the key is performing acts that are "hidden from the world, but known by God." That goes for both a reclusive World War II spy and the self-effacing parent of an ill child, both of them quiet heroes.

# Israel's Choice

Hope for a negotiated peace agreement in the Middle East hangs by the thinnest of threads. Israel's 10-month freeze on the building of new settlements in the West Bank expired at midnight on Sept. 26 despite international pressure to extend the moratorium. Palestinian leaders have not pulled out of talks yet, as they threatened to do, but they may be in a politically untenable position. Even seasoned observers of the Middle East cannot help but feel frustrated by what is beginning to look like yet another missed opportunity.

The September deadline hung heavy in the air from the beginning of the U.S.-led talks. The hope that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was politically powerful enough to convince his more conservative coalition to extend the moratorium turned out to be mere wishful thinking. Shortly after the midnight deadline, Mr. Netanyahu pleaded with his partner in the talks, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, to continue with negotiations, but it is difficult to see how Abbas can move forward without any concessions from the Israelis.

So the United States and the other members of the so-called quartet working for peace—the United Nations, the European Union and the Russian Federation—are left, once again, to wait. As we go to press, President Abbas is planning to meet with Arab leaders to decide on a plan of action. We hope that he is willing to continue negotiations; but without any breakthrough on the question of settlements, the chances for an agreement seem slim. Further complicating matters is the contention by the Israeli pacifist group Peace Now that construction slowed but did not freeze completely during the moratorium.

What makes the current stalemate especially vexing is that both sides know what is required to reach peace: a return to pre-1967 borders, land swaps, the sharing of Jerusalem, recognition of Israel by its Arab neighbors and an agreed remedy to the refugee question. Preventing progress now are the radical elements on both sides, notably Jewish settlers on the West Bank, whose theological fervor for building on the “promised land” shows no signs of fading. If anything, the settler movement has become even more influential in Israeli politics, forcing Mr. Netanyahu's Likud party farther to the right.

The prime minister won praise from the settlers' supporters for staying true to his word and not extending the

moratorium. The 10-month window was meant to facilitate talks with the Palestinians, but Palestinian leaders did not agree to engage in negotiations until almost nine months into the moratorium. Still, Mr. Abbas and his partners must now wonder whether a final peace is possible, given that Israel is unwilling to budge on this crucial issue. There are already nearly 300,000 settlers in the West Bank, and Peace Now warns that number could quickly escalate if construction is left unchecked.

When President Obama invited Israeli and Palestinian leaders to talks, it seemed possible that Mr. Netanyahu could, like President Nixon, defy his own party and make peace with a longtime enemy. The hawkish Netanyahu is an unlikely peacemaker, but there were reasons for modest hope. He endorsed a two-state solution in June 2009, though with conditions, and implemented the settlement freeze the following November.

These hopes are now all but dashed. If Prime Minister Netanyahu cannot convince his coalition partners to end settlement construction, there is very little chance that anyone can. So what is to be done? The current path is untenable. Within a generation Arabs could constitute a majority in Greater Israel (Israel, West Bank and Gaza); their subjugation is beginning more and more to look like a system of apartheid. Israel needs to be reminded that the alternatives to a two-state solution are few and unattractive. A single state, for example, with equal rights for all citizens, would be the death knell for the Jewish state as it now exists. Another plan, proposed by the well-respected prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, Salaam Fayyad, would establish a Palestinian state by August 2011, regardless of the status of peace negotiations.

Whether the Palestinian Authority has the resources to build a state is an open question; Israel remains in control of much of the infrastructure in the region. What is clear is that at least one player in these talks has yet to exercise its full authority in the cause of peace. With its annual \$3 billion in direct aid to Israel, the United States remains uniquely capable of applying the pressure needed to bring settlement construction to a halt. If the current peace talks fail, American political leaders will surely deserve some of the blame.



# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

HAITI

## Bishops Present Plan For Rebuilding Church Life

**A**lmost 10 months after a magnitude 7 earthquake devastated Haiti in January, it is worth noting something that has not come to pass: Social unrest has not become widespread, as some feared it would, although thousands of homeless are still living in tents in and around Port-au-Prince; doctors have not reported residual public health calamities or outbreaks of contagious diseases, as was predicted; and so far the 2010 hurricane season has spared Haiti from a secondary natural disaster.

Relief that more tragedy has not followed in the wake of the nation's unprecedented catastrophe was palpable at an international summit of bishops and church leaders who convened in Miami from Sept. 22 to 26. The meeting's purpose was to forge new mechanisms for rebuilding church life in Haiti and developing strategies to deploy an estimated \$330 million in Catholic donations collected worldwide after the disaster on Jan. 12. American Catholics alone contributed some \$148 million for humanitarian relief and reconstruction. The Haitian hierarchy committed themselves to a broad-based church reconstruction plan, with substantial support coming from church partners in North America and Europe, called the Program for the Reconstruction of the Church in Haiti.

The reconstruction plan will be submitted to the U.S. bishops for approval at their November meeting. The exact budget has not been final-

ized, and the bishops expect the reconstruction project to be long and costly. Of the total funds now available, just



**A young girl tends to dinner at a tent city near Port-au-Prince.**

over \$30 million are designated for church rebuilding projects, which bishops concede will fall far short of

POVERTY

## Activists Assess Progress Toward Millennium Development Goals

**A**mid horn-blowing gridlock around the United Nations on Sept. 20, world leaders gathered to discuss progress or the lack thereof in achieving the Millennium Development Goals for cutting global poverty and combating hunger and disease by 2015. With five years to go, even keen supporters of the various M.D.G. initiatives acknowledged that the overall effort is behind schedule. Few donor nations have honored commitments to direct 0.7 percent of their gross national product toward the alleviation of global poverty.

A far smaller group assembled across the street at the U.N. Church Center to consider some of the same issues. Their opinions ranged from hopeful to bleak.

David Beckmann, a Lutheran minister and economist who is president of Bread for the World, was among the hopeful. He used the image of the exodus of the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt to describe a growing liberation from hunger throughout the world, of "God moving in our history." He said reduction of hunger in nations as far flung as Bangladesh, Ethiopia,

Brazil and Ghana make "what happened at the Red Sea look like small potatoes." Nevertheless, goals remain unachieved, and therefore Americans, he said, need to push their congressional representatives to fund U.S. antihunger initiatives and to make its foreign aid program more effective.

Katherine Marshall of World Faiths Development Dialogues, called reduced poverty "a reachable dream." But, she said, gender inequality still hinders efforts to mitigate global poverty.

War likewise can be a major factor in locking people into poverty. But Arthur Keys, chief executive officer of International Relief and Development, said that successful development work could continue even in conflict zones. His own organization has assisted



PHOTO: TOM TRACY

now in ruins. In terms of humanitarian vulnerabilities in Haiti, most of the concern centers around the patchwork of tent cities in which many Haitians are still forced to seek shelter. In the absence of other authority, gangs have reportedly stepped in, and the victimization of women and children has been on the rise.

The Most Rev. Joseph Gontrand Décoste, S.J., bishop of the south Haitian diocese of Jérémie, who visited Miami for the meetings, said his diocese has received some 14,000 families, or 100,000 refugees since the earthquake. “We didn’t want to have that same dynamic of the camps because it makes the situation more complicated, so we found them placement with host families or families of origin,” Bishop Décoste said. Many have since migrated back to Port-au-Prince in search of employment opportunities.

“From my personal perspective, while they are deeply impacted, this is

not a paralyzed and traumatized [church],” said Andrew Small, O.M.I., director of the Subcommittee on the Church in Latin America of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Office of National Collections. “What we have done over the past nine months is act as very necessary buttresses to a very weak and traumatized people to help them get back on their feet so that they can start thinking again about the future—which is going to be very difficult,” Father Small said.

Haitian church officials presented a detailed and updated picture of the damages to church institutions, universities, hospitals and parish life in Haiti during the conference. “We saw purpose, resolve, energy and love for the people. We were surprised at the level of detail that the Haitian bishops came up with.”

**TOM TRACY** is a photojournalist based in south Florida.

the actual cost of rebuilding churches, rectories, seminaries, hospitals, convents and a national cathedral that is

farmers in Afghanistan, improving both the viability of their agricultural economy and their communal resistance to the Taliban.

Thomas Pogee, director of the Global Justice Program at Yale University, complained that the donor response to world poverty has been “ridiculous,” given the magnitude of the problem. One in three people dies of poverty-related causes, he said, citing corruption in developing countries as one of many barriers to reducing poverty. Rich countries also do harm by protecting their own products through restrictions on imports from poor nations. And making matters worse, the poor are often not at the table when decisions that affect them are made.

Melinda St. Louis, director of

Jubilee USA, offered some evidence that stubborn unwillingness to accept defeat can transform antipoverty efforts. She spoke of the way faith-based groups came together in the mid-1990s to press for debt forgiveness as a tool for reducing poverty. Because of this initiative, over a million children in Tanzania were able to attend school, and hundreds of new classrooms were built in Ghana. She and her co-workers had been told when they began their efforts that debt relief was impossible.

In the end, though, the advocates for debt forgiveness convinced world leaders to move ahead on debt justice, which, despite successes, remains an unfinished project. Twenty very poor countries were “left out of debt relief

deals, and inappropriate lending and borrowing has continued,” she said. But if there is still unfinished business, and, as Professor Pogee says, “large forces are at work against the poor,” so, too, there are good forces working for them.



**A boy collects scrap from a river to sell in Paranaque City, Manila.**

## The Dream Act Endures

The Dream Act, which allows children of undocumented immigrants to work toward legal status and pursue a college education, failed again on Sept. 21 to pass through the U.S. Senate. But Kevin Appleby, director of migration policy and public affairs for the U.S. bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services, expressed confidence on Sept. 24 that the idea "is gaining more support on the merits." The legislation regularizes the legal status of people who came to the United States before age 16, lived here at least five years, graduated from a U.S. high school and were pursuing higher education or military service. According to the Migration Policy Institute, approximately 114,000 young people who have already obtained at least an associate's degree would be immediately eligible for conditional lawful permanent resident status under the legislation. Another 612,000 high school graduates could be eligible if they graduated from college or completed two years of military service.

## Church Hopes Rise In Oaxaca

The Rev. Carlos Salvador Wotto, an octogenarian priest in the southern Mexican city of Oaxaca, was murdered on July 28 at Our Lady of the Snows Parish. The Rev. Wilfrido Mayren Pelaez, director of the peace and reconciliation ministry of the Archdiocese of Oaxaca, does not accept the government's theory about the killing. "They disguised a murder as a robbery; there wasn't enough money, enough things of value taken," he said. The murder marked the latest in a series of attacks against priests, who have at times clashed with an outgoing

## NEWS BRIEFS

**Chiara Badano**, a young member of the Focolare movement who died of bone cancer in 1990, was beatified on Sept. 25 in Rome. • Bishop Raul Vera López of Saltillo, Mexico, was honored by Norway's Rafto Foundation for Human Rights on Sept. 23 for his opposition to immunity for government officials and his work in **defense of oppressed groups** in Mexico. • U.S. Catholic Worker groups were among the antiwar, environmental and animal-rights **activists wrongly investigated** by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, according to a report from the Justice Department on Sept. 20. • The United Kingdom group **Christian Concern for our Nation** is urging British Christians to wear a "Not Ashamed" logo during Advent to protest discrimination endured, it alleges, by Christians in the United Kingdom. • Sue Krentz, an Arizona woman who has embodied **border-area problems** since her husband's murder in March, was seriously injured on Sept. 25 after she and another woman were hit by a car after attending Mass in Douglas, Ariz.



Chiara Badano

state government controlled for the past 80 years by the Institutional Revolutionary Party, notorious for corruption, coercion and thuggery. But Oaxaca voted for change on July 4 when it opted for a four-party coalition headed by Gabino Cue Monteagudo. And the governor-elect has promised to do away with old I.R.P. vices, improve governance in one of Mexico's most impoverished and least transparent states and provide justice in cases of human rights abuses. Church officials are among those with high expectations as they press to have crimes committed against priests fully investigated and finally resolved.

## Pro-Euthanasia Move Watched in Quebec

Margaret Somerville, founding director of the Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law at Toronto's McGill

University, said ethicists are keeping an eye on Quebec, where a legislative committee is holding public hearings on euthanasia. International campaigners see Quebec as a vulnerable beachhead for legalizing euthanasia in Canada, and then in the rest of North America. Though many Canadians outside Quebec were reassured earlier this year by the resounding defeat of a Bloc Québécois private member's bill in favor of euthanasia and assisted suicide, Somerville said pro-euthanasia forces regroup after each defeat. Surveys show about 79 percent of Quebec residents "think euthanasia is a good idea." Though the rest of Canada is opposed to euthanasia, John Zucchi, a history professor at McGill, warned that Quebec's support of it could have a domino effect.

From CNS and other sources.



# Still Points

A bewildered traveller was once walking in a strange country. Feeling fearful, without map or compass, he came to the junction of three trails. There was no signpost to indicate where any of them might lead. As he sat on a rock, contemplating the problem, a young boy came by and wished him a bright “Good Morning!” The traveler replied, “And a very good morning to you, son. Can you help me, please? I’m not from these parts, and I’m lost. Where does that trail over there lead?”

“Sorry, sir, I don’t know” said the boy.

“Well, what about that second trail there?”

“Sorry, sir,” replied the boy, “I don’t know.” By now the traveller was getting impatient. “O.K., where does this third trail go?”

“Sorry sir, I don’t know,” came the cheerful reply.

Now seriously frustrated, the traveller snapped back, “For goodness sake, boy, what do you know?”

“I know I’m not lost, sir,” came the confident rejoinder, as the boy went on his way.

I can empathize with the traveller who does not have any idea where he is or which way to go next. This is how I often feel myself, when none of the paths ahead shows any clue as to where it might lead. But I can also identify with the young boy, who admits that he doesn’t know where any trail leads, but who knows for sure that he is not lost.

Not knowing where to go next is not necessarily the same thing as being lost, though the two conditions usually feel much the same. We panic easily when we find ourselves on unfamiliar ground without any signposts. We feel anxious when there are several paths we could follow but we can not predict where they might take us. We want certainty. We want a God who tells us exactly which way to go and what to do next. Instead, we find a God who meets us in the wilderness with the words: “Don’t be afraid. You are not lost. You are just a bit bewildered. If you want to know where the future leads, put your hand in mine and come and see.”

What makes us able to say, honestly, that we believe that promise, that we trust those words? Are they just a cliché, something we would love to believe but usually opt instead for our own paths and our own maps. What could it possibly mean, to know that we are not lost?

One thing that consistently helps me to trust in times of turbulence is my memory of past situations when I have felt myself in the midst of a whirlwind and yet have discovered, right in the eye of the storm, a still center that I know from experience is more real, more true and more trustworthy than anything the storm might throw at me. I can, and do, creep into that still center when I don’t know where I am. Once there, I know I am not lost and never can be.

The family cat is another unlikely mentor in the matter of trust. He has

just made a big move, from the English Midlands to the west of Scotland. He howled all the way in the back of the car, in spite of threats to put him up on the roof and use him as a siren. When he arrived, he didn’t know where he had landed or what might happen to him next. But he stopped howling. He did a careful reconnoiter of the new terrain before settling down in a dark corner to gather himself and become

grounded again in an unfamiliar place, not trying to work anything out, just waiting for things to reshape themselves before resuming business as usual. Not for the first time I saw that I have much to learn from him.

At this time of the year, when we may be starting new work, a

new school, a new academic year, we are especially vulnerable to feeling lost. We may beseech God in our prayers, or in the silence of our anxieties, to show us which way to go. And if we are willing to be led by Jesus’ wisdom (Jn 1:39), we will hear the invitation ourselves to “come and see.” Jesus gives no specific address, no clear directions for getting there, simply that invitation to discover for ourselves, with him, where the future is beckoning us.

To hear that invitation, we will need to find the still point in the center of the storm. Only in that inner cave of silence will we, like Elijah, be able to discern the “still, small voice” of God. And to respond to the invitation we will need to trust that wherever life has thrown us, we are not lost.

To hear God,  
we need to  
find the  
silence  
in the center  
of the  
storm.

MARGARET SILF lives in Scotland. Her latest books are *Companions of Christ, The Gift of Prayer* and *Compass Points*.



PHOTO: REUTERS/MOHAMMED AMEEN

**A displaced Christian woman receives supplies from the Muslim Red Crescent organization in Baghdad in 2008.**



## INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS AND THE SYNOD FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

# Christians And Muslims Together

BY ELIAS D. MALLON

**P**ope Benedict XVI was standing in prayer in the beautiful Blue Mosque in Istanbul. Alongside him stood Ali Bardakoglu, the president of the Religious Affairs Directorate of Turkey. The image of the two men standing side by side in silent prayer on Nov. 30, 2006, presented a stark contrast to the riotous Muslim reaction to Benedict's lecture 11 weeks earlier in Regensburg, Germany. There the pope's quotation of a passage from Emperor Manuel II Paleologos to the effect that the only thing that Muhammad had brought was "cruel and inhuman" had unleashed a storm of outrage across the Muslim world. The two events provide a paradigm of Catholic-Muslim relations: On the one side, mutual respect and dialogue, and on the other, misunderstanding, turmoil and resentment.

Last September Pope Benedict XVI convoked a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East to take place in Rome from Oct. 10 to 24, 2010. The convocation was announced during a meeting between the pope and major patriarchs and archbishops of the seven Catholic churches in the Middle East: the Coptic, Melkite (Byzantine Rite), Maronite, Syrian, Chaldaean, Armenian and Latin (Roman). Although the assembly will deal primarily with Catholic churches in the region, all Christians—Orthodox and Protestant as well—share the same concerns and experience many of the same problems as Catholics in the Middle East. The overarching situation they all feel is living as a religious minority in rapidly changing Muslim societies.

What follows is an examination of three closely related topics the synod will have to address: 1) formal interfaith (Muslim-Christian) rela-

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tions; 2) interaction between Muslims and Christians in everyday life and 3) the factors spurring Christian emigration from the region.

## Leaders and Scholars

With the publication of “The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” (“Nostra Aetate”) in October 1965, at the end of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church committed itself to dialogue with Islam, which, the declaration said, it holds in “high regard.” Since that time the Catholic Church has engaged in widespread, high-level dialogue with Muslim religious leaders and thinkers. Although there have been bumps along the way, the dialogue has been fruitful.

Pope Benedict has visited several Muslim countries, and Muslim leaders have visited him at the Vatican. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia visited the pope in November 2007—the first visit of a Saudi monarch to the Vatican. The following summer (July 2008) the king’s interfaith conference in Madrid called for increased contact and dialogue between Muslims, Jews and Christians. In 2009 the pope visited King Abdullah II of Jordan and gave a major address at the King Hussein State Mosque in Amman.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has sponsored and engaged in many dialogues and conferences on topics of mutual interest with Muslims. There have been exchanges of faculty members between Catholic and Muslim universities, with Muslim scholars teaching at pontifical universities, like the Gregorian in Rome, and Catholic professors teaching at universities in Turkey, Iran and elsewhere. On this level there are many signs of healthy dialogue. While the pope’s Regensburg lecture was met with outrage in Muslim quarters and some people engaged in the dialogue wondered if relations with Muslims had been mortally wounded, the pope’s speedy explanation and expression of regret helped to defuse the situation. Benedict met with groups of Muslim leaders. Then in October 2007 leading Muslim scholars, under the sponsorship of the Jordanian royal family, published an open letter titled “A Common Word Between Us and You” in an effort to establish contacts at greater depth with the Christian world.

“A Common Word” was initially signed by 138 Muslim thinkers (more signed on later) from an array of Muslim traditions, as broad a representation of Islamic schools and sects as one can find in modern times. The document is addressed by name to 28 Christian leaders and “leaders of Christian Churches everywhere,” which reveals a sophisticated understanding of the diversity of Christianity. The “common word” the authors chose to share was “the love of God.”

Several conferences of Catholic bishops, cardinals and

ecumenists have been among those who signed on to the process. In the United States, follow-up conferences have been held at Georgetown University and Yale, and at Cambridge University in Britain. In terms of public awareness and the range of people now engaged in discussions, “A Common Word” helped to move the dialogue between Christians and Muslims to an expanded level.

Most important, the Vatican initiated a new round of formal dialogues with representative Muslim scholar-participants. It has two tracks. The first deals with the religious and theological issues raised in the letter. The second addresses practical, pastoral and social-ethical issues of concern to the church worldwide, but of special relevance to the Middle East, where in many places Christians find their rights denied. These include human rights, tolerance and religious liberty. Pope Benedict has sometimes referred to this package of issues as “reciprocity,” by which he means the need for Muslim countries in the Middle East to allow the same freedoms for Christians in Islamic lands that Muslims enjoy in the West.

## Encounters in Everyday Life

If relations between Catholic and Muslim leaders are for the most part very good, relations on the local level are often problematic, if not dangerous. Since the publication of “Nostra Aetate” many events have transpired that have profoundly influenced local Christian-Muslim relations for the worse: the occupation of the West Bank/Palestine (1967); the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990); the Iranian revolution (1979); the first and second intifada (1987–1993; 2000–); the first and second Persian Gulf wars (January-February 1991; 2003–); the war in Afghanistan (2001–); the rise of “militant Islam” or “Islamism”; and numerous localized conflicts among Israel and Lebanon and the Palestinians. These have made it very difficult for Christians living in the Middle East.

Middle Eastern Christians experienced the same wars, deprivations and sufferings as their Muslim neighbors. The historical traumas of the last 60 years, however, have put greater pressure on Christians, especially with the rise in the 1990s of a politically resurgent and militant Islam. Since many Muslims perceive some of these events as attacks by the West on Islam, in many places the situation of Middle Eastern Christians has grown precarious. For that reason, the church has tried to encourage their full civic engagement in nonconfessional secular states whenever this is a real possibility. In addition, the diplomatic policy of the Holy See has sought to guarantee religious liberty and full civic equality for Christians in the region.

The Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East,

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like the Vatican, stresses notions of “citizenship” that transcend religious identity and entail equality for all citizens. The situation in which Christians find themselves varies greatly from country to country. In Lebanon and Jordan Christians are relatively free and equal, while in Saudi Arabia, they are severely restricted. Notable progress has been made in recent years in some Gulf states (Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain), especially in the construction of churches, mostly for congregations of guest workers. But in other countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and to a lesser extent Egypt, barriers exist to full exercise of freedom of religion.

### Violence Against Christians

A result of the breakdown of society in Middle Eastern countries like Lebanon during its civil war and Iraq and Afghanistan at present, has been a massive increase in lawlessness and violence. Extremist organizations like Al Qaeda do not hesitate to use violence and terror against civilians. While the vast majority of casualties from Muslim terrorist attacks are other Muslims, local Christians often provide convenient targets and, given their numerical and political weakness, suffer a disproportionate amount of the violence.

The number of violent attacks directed at Christians because of their religious identity has risen markedly in recent years. A coordinated bombing of six churches in Mosul and Baghdad, for example, took place on Jan. 6, 2008. The following month Archbishop Paulos F. Rahho of Mosul was kidnapped; his body was found weeks later. Six more bombs were detonated in front of Christian churches in Baghdad in July 2009. Reports from Christians living in Iraq indicate that they are under constant threat of kidnapping, violence and murder. It is estimated that since the beginning of the second Gulf war, half the Christian population has left Iraq. Although Christians comprised a minority of less than 5 percent of the total population, almost 40 percent of Iraqi refugees are Christians.

Even in secular Turkey there have been very public instances of violence against Christians. On Feb. 5, 2006, Andrea Santoro, a Capuchin priest, was murdered, apparently in retaliation for the publication of anti-Muslim cartoons in a Danish newspaper. Four years later, on June 3, 2010, Bishop Luigi Padovese was murdered by his own driver. While it is not clear that the latter was a crime motivated by religion, and Benedict XVI has stated that it was not so motivated, such acts do not make Christians in the region feel any more comfortable. While Catholic-Muslim relations appear to be doing well at the level of the leaders of the two faiths, demographic, political and cultural forces, like militant Islam, have made life increasingly difficult for many Christians living in the region.

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## The Dilemmas of Emigration

In the past century Christian emigration from the Middle East has reached alarming proportions. It is estimated that in 1900 more than 25 percent of the population of Istanbul was Christian. The figure is now 0.2 percent. In 1948 Jerusalem was 20 percent Christian. Today the proportion is about 2 percent. Christians who once were the overwhelming majority in cities like Bethlehem now find themselves in the minority; by some estimates they have gone from being 80 percent of the population a few decades ago to 15 percent today.

Christian leaders in the Middle East have long recognized the possibility that a viable Christian presence may be lost in the very lands where Christianity was born. The synod has listed emigration as one of the primary problems it will address. Merely to assert that Christian migration from the Middle East has to be stopped, however, is not a realistic response. Without changes in the environment in which Christians live, calls from synods, the Council of Patriarchs and local church leaders to stem the tide of emigration are not likely to be effective. If Christian families are discriminated against or subject to violence, those who can will do so to protect themselves and their families. While some brave spirits may choose to continue to give witness to Christianity in the Middle East, it is highly unlikely that they will be a majority.

Clearly emigration is a major crisis for the Eastern Catholic churches as well as for the universal church, not to mention the other historic churches of the region. Middle Eastern Christians have rich theological, spiritual and liturgical traditions that go back to the very beginnings of Christianity. To be deprived of these would be a loss for all Christians. When Christians emigrate, they face a double threat: first, the threat of becoming so assimilated into the cultures of their new countries that they lose their distinctive traditions; second, the threat of becoming "ghettoized," reduced to living in exotic religious enclaves. The first threat imperils their identity; the second their viability.

The synod has a daunting task ahead of it. It needs to address the problems of Christians in the Middle East and provide them with support and encouragement in meeting them. The synod must also address Middle Eastern Christians living—probably permanently—outside the Middle East and help them to adapt to their new situations and to bring the gifts of their ancient traditions to new countries and new cultures. The members of the synod can be assured that Christians all over the world are of "one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32) in praying for their success. **A**

*Editor's Note:* While Catholic-Muslim dialogue is the major interfaith encounter in the region, we attempted to find a contribution on the Catholic-Jewish dialogue in Israel, but were unable to do so by deadline.

# Remember the Exiles

The problem of refugees facing the churches of the Middle East

BY JOSEPH CORNELIUS DONNELLY AND DREW CHRISTIANSEN



PHOTO: CNS/ALESSIA GIULIANI, CATHOLIC PRESS

**Pope Benedict XVI and Melkite Patriarch Gregoire III Laham of Damascus, Syria, arrive for an evening prayer service at the Melkite Catholic Cathedral of St. George in Amman, Jordan, on May 9, 2009.**

**B**eing a refugee should be a temporary condition. Under international law, people who have fled their homes out of fear of persecution should be able to return home once conditions improve or, when they are prevented from doing so, make a new home elsewhere. To be uprooted from one's home is especially traumatic in the Middle East, where family, home and ancestral ties to the land are essential to one's identity. People hold on to their house keys years after they have been expelled or taken flight.

Once a year, for example, Palestinians forced from their homes in West Jerusalem in 1948 recall their old homes by shaking their keys in a public display of dispossession and

longing. Exploring that attachment, the Israeli daily Haaretz published on July 23 a profile of Claudette Habesch, the president of Caritas Jerusalem, who was evicted from her Jerusalem home during the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. "I am prepared to forgive them," Mrs. Habesch told reporter Akiva Eldar, referring to those who took over her childhood home, "but I will never forget the years of suffering of a little girl of 7, in whose bed another child was sleeping and whose bicycle another child was riding."

## Generations of Displaced

Today in the Middle East, living as a refugee has become a permanent condition. More than four million Palestinian refugees from the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1968 are scattered across the region. The Lebanese civil war (1975-90), the 2006 Israeli war against Hezbollah and ongoing internal and regional tensions have led hundreds of thousands more, both Christian and Muslim, to emigrate from Lebanon. The 1990-91 Persian Gulf war and the subse-

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quent sanctions against Iraq sent tens of thousands of Iraqis in flight to neighboring countries, where they eked out an existence at the edge of society. The chaos that followed the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 also led hundreds of thousands to flee their homes in search of asylum from religious and political persecution.

Because of the vagaries of international politics, few in these waves of “displaced” Iraqis, unlike the Palestinian refugees of 1948, ever received official recognition. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated in 2008 that across the Middle East more than two million Iraqi refugees were under its mandate, but only some 300,000 were officially registered. The unregistered hid in urban slums, fending for themselves in the gray economy. A large portion of the Iraqi refugee population is Christian. As of 2007, there were an estimated one million refugees in Jordan alone and an equal number in Syria, with an additional 2.8 million internally displaced persons in Iraq proper, with most of the remaining Christian population clustered in the autonomous Kurdish zone in the north of the country. Maryanne Loughry of the Center for Human Rights and International Justice at Boston College, summarizing the view of many who have studied the situation, describes the plight of the Iraqi refugees as “a crisis that is deepening and without an end in sight.”

The upcoming Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East (Oct. 10-24) will consider both emigration and immigration as matters of special pastoral concern, and well it should, because the numbers of Catholics involved are significant. (In Saudi Arabia alone, for example, an estimated two million Latin Catholic immigrants are without pastoral care and are denied the right to worship.) It seems, however, that in the Paul VI Synod Hall, the auditorium where members of the synod will make their addresses and take their votes, the uninvited guest that has gone unacknowledged is the refugee church: the Christian refugees, especially from Iraq, and the larger refugee population that the local and international church have served for so long.

## Reasons for Silence

The Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East, at its congress in 1999, gave barely a nod to the refugee issue. The congress made many recommendations about the emigrant Eastern Catholic communities and their links with their communities of origin, but it spoke not at all of refugees, only of “the displaced” (Proposition 82). That

characterization avoided legal entanglements that could have required host countries to accord to the so-called displaced the rights of refugees and so the council recommended that political authorities try to return them to their countries of origin “by all the means available.” The recommendation was not a harsh demand for forced repatriation, but it seemed to be a way to say the displaced were unwelcome. In the case of Palestinian refugees, it was also a way to make a political statement: that under international law the refugees had a right to return to the homes in Israel from which they had been driven.

The Eastern churches, including the Latin church, and the countries in which they reside face a difficult dilemma:

Deny the reality of the refugee population and retain the existing political and social arrangements of the host countries; or demand that host countries accept and integrate them and thus invite dis-

ruptive, very likely violent social change.

Church social teaching would seem to urge the integration into new lands. Levels of acceptance without formal integration vary from country to country. Refugees of long standing live normal lives in Syria and Jordan; Jordan grants passports to many. In Lebanon, refugees have only lately been granted the right to work, but outside the professions. More recent refugees frequently live in the shadows because an acknowledgment of their presence would upend local political balances.

If the churches openly support full integration of newcomers into their host countries, delicate religious and political settlements will be upset. In Lebanon, for example, the religious balance of the country would tilt heavily to the Muslim side, giving greater weight to the Shiites and thereby placing in jeopardy the rationale for Christians holding the presidency. In Jordan, Palestinians, already a de facto majority, would clearly outnumber the native population. Israel has ruled out even a symbolic return of Palestinians to the Jewish state for fear of compromising the Jewish majority and with it the country’s national identity.

It is therefore easy to see why the synod’s working document avoids the refugee question. It is as nettlesome as any issue could be. Why should the churches, which are a minority presence in the region, take on a problem with such little hope of success and such great risk of unhappy outcomes? We believe there are both pastoral and prophetic reasons for the synod not only to make recommendations for social-pastoral action, but also to speak out on behalf of “the refugee church” and the wider refugee population.

## At the synod, the uninvited guest that has gone unacknowledged is the refugee church.

## The Pastoral Needs of Displaced People

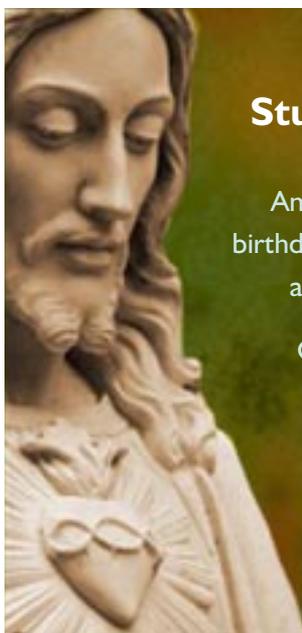
First, the officially recognized and especially the unrecognized refugees in the Middle East represent a human rights challenge that is not being addressed by the sending countries or the host countries or the international community. Having repeatedly committed itself to the service of human rights beginning with Pope John XXIII's encyclical "Peace on Earth" and the Second Vatican Council's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," may the church in synod avoid addressing the Middle East's refugees because it is politically inconvenient? Must those across the region who have been forcibly displaced from their homes with no reasonable hope of return remain stateless persons denied their human rights for the foreseeable future?

The church's teaching on migration is rooted in its affirmation of the dignity of the human person further supported by the unity of the human family in creation, covenantal duties to the stranger and Christian love of neighbor. Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Holy See's permanent observer to the United Nations in Geneva and one of the church's leading experts on migration, points out that Catholic teaching on human rights supports several propositions relevant to the refugee question:

- Moving away from the dangers of violence, hunger and oppression is a natural right of every person;

- The exercise of this right needs to be regulated by states;
- The right of hospitality and integration into a host society should balance the common good with the rights of the individual;
- Forcibly displaced persons have a just claim on the international community to be assisted in order to return to a normal existence;
- Displaced people searching for a more dignified life but present in an irregular situation in a host country are not without rights.
- An international regime should be established to better manage all forced human displacement, a social phenomenon that is transitional by nature. (See "Human Rights as a Framework for Advocacy," in David Hollenbach, ed., *Driven From Home: Protecting the Rights of Forced Migrants* [Georgetown, 2010].)

Second, service of the refugees is an immediate social-pastoral problem for the church. Local pastors, bishops and Catholic Charities agencies, as well as nongovernmental organizations like Catholic Near East Welfare Association/Pontifical Mission and the Jesuit Refugee Service, scramble to assist the invisible refugees in receiving communities. But in a hard-pressed region, every choice is one between serving struggling established communities



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already in place or those just getting on their feet and the waves of needy new arrivals who flood in upon them. The church's service agencies can meet only a fraction of the need. Aid and support are being extended heroically, but because of the vagaries of international funding and the technicalities of international refugee policy, the humanitarian outreach is limited.

Third, there are direct needs for spiritual ministry to Christian refugees, especially in celebration of the liturgy and administration of the sacraments, which strain local clergy and their communities. Coping with refugee populations may also demand new skills or augmentation of existing ones to supply aid, provide employment or offer pastoral and family counseling.

At the same time, structural questions about the Eastern Catholic churches and their interrelationships emerge. How can the historic religious identity of refugee populations be preserved in a new land by a sister church? Will service of an emigré population interfere with attempts to persuade the exiles to return home and/or remain faithful to the rite of their ancestors? Will new eparchies and exarchates (Eastern dioceses) be established or strengthened to accommodate demographic shifts? Will receiving churches that provide support to the refugees resist the temptation to recruit new members from those they are aiding?

Answers to these questions may emerge in part from the synod's central deliberation on communion among the particular churches—that is, how Melkites and Maronites, Chaldeans and Latins, to name four, live together in unity and with greater charity. Fostering the sense of mystical union in which all the churches are rooted is fundamental. It provides a spiritual starting point for greater mutual understanding and closer cooperation. For the church this is, to be sure, an end in itself. But in this time of crisis, one must also ask, for what purpose? How will we experience the fruit of this unity in Christ? This meeting is called a special assembly because the regional situation presents all the churches with exceptional challenges at the level of pastoral care and social engagement. Addressing the needs of refugees, particularly the Christians among them, presents a major test of the church's pastoral capacities.

## Prophetic Responsibilities

The church as a whole must also weigh its prophetic responsibility for refugees. The practical imperatives of church governance and international diplomacy ought not inhibit the church's prophetic witness for the stateless. After visiting the Daheisheh Refugee Camp outside of Bethlehem in 2000, Pope John Paul publicly affirmed the Palestinians' "natural right to a homeland of [their] own," committing the church "to be at [the] side" of the refugees "and to plead [their] cause to the world." Today's refugees need to hear

from the synod similar expressions of solidarity.

At the same time, with peace in the Middle East on the diplomatic agenda once more, a prophetic challenge to the international community is needed on the refugee question. For both Israelis and Palestinians, the refugee issue is a deal-breaker. Only a regional accord in which the international community is fully involved has a chance of finding a solution. The church, which has been a servant and advocate for refugees so often in modern history, ought now, gathered in synod, to speak out for a comprehensive, long-term solution to the refugee problems in the Middle East. It ought to hold up for the world to hear its own teaching on the human rights to be integrated into society and to establish a home for one's family, and it should challenge the world community to uphold its commitments to the Convention on the Status of Refugees and other international instruments.

### Education and Advocacy

Last, during a time of xenophobia in much of the world, the synod should remind bishops, priests and preachers everywhere to educate parishioners about the church's teaching on migration and the rights of refugees. In the United States, the bishops' conference will observe National Migration Week from Jan. 2 to Jan. 9, 2011, beginning with

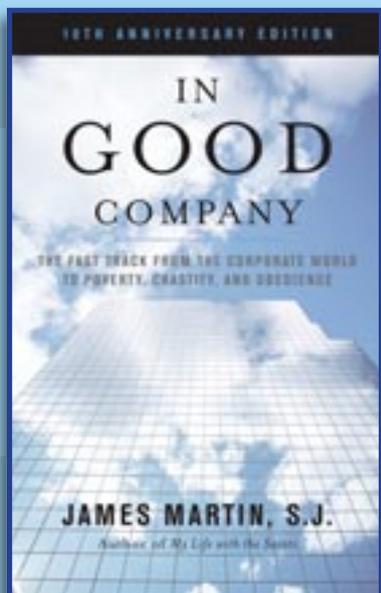
the feast of the Epiphany and the remembrance of the flight into Egypt, an archetypal Christian memory of forced displacement and a search for refuge. Epiphany and Migration Week offer an opportunity to educate parishioners about the church's teaching on migrants and their rights and for local groups to become involved in advocacy on U.S. refugee policy.

As the social ethicist David Hollenbach, S.J., has written in his new collection *Driven From Home*: "Though the mass displacement of Iraqis today has not been caused solely by U.S. military action in that country, the initiation of the Iraq conflict by U.S. intervention gives rise to special obligations toward displaced Iraqis." The annual quota for admission of Iraqi refugees to the United States, especially for Christians fleeing religious persecution, however, has been disgracefully inadequate, and the actual admission rate has been even lower than the total allowed. American Catholics could respond to the backlogged needs of Middle East refugees by pressing the State Department to admit the full complement of positions allotted for Iraqis each year. For its part, the synod should affirm the responsibilities of the Eastern churches that are on the spot to offer hospitality, protection and advocacy on behalf of those in their midst who have been forcibly driven from home. **A**

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# The Christian Stake In Mideast Peace

BY WILLIAM H. KEELER

Palestinian children hold candles during a Christmas celebration at Parliament Square in Beirut, Lebanon.



The Middle East was once called the cradle of Christianity because the faith first flourished in the lands from Mesopotamia to Anatolia (modern-day Iraq and Turkey) in Syria, Lebanon and the Holy Land. But since the late 19th century, Middle Eastern Christians have been emigrating to flee conflict and to find a better life. In the last several decades, armed conflict and religious persecution have taken an exceptional toll on the Christians of the region.

The Christian population of Iraq has dropped by more than half, and Christians are emigrating from Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and Egypt too. Across the Middle East Christians of various traditions continue to suffer from prejudice, interreligious tensions and persecution. It is not surprising then that the Chaldean bishops, who lead a church indigenous to Iraq, petitioned Pope Benedict XVI to convoke a special assembly of the Synod of Bishops this month to consider the situation of the Christians in the Middle East.

## International and Interfaith Pressures

The predicament of Middle Eastern Christians results from both international and interfaith hostilities. The flight of Christians from Iraq, as well as the pressures that the Christians who remain there endure from fundamentalist Muslims, is due to the breakdown of communal relations and law enforcement following the American invasion in 2003. The lack of resolution of the Palestinian question and the 2006 Israeli war against Hezbollah in Lebanon have led directly to Christian emigration in a desire to escape violence, occupation and insecurity. Indirectly, the strengthening of militant Muslim parties, like Hezbollah and Hamas, a result of the failure to resolve the conflict and of exploitation of the resulting deadlock for partisan advantage, has also put Christians at a disadvantage and driven many away from their ancestral homes.

For decades Lebanon had been a sanctuary for Arab

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Christians and a model of cosmopolitan living. After a long civil war, Israeli occupation and repeated punitive attacks, including the 2006 war, the fragile Lebanese government has been forced to accept the Islamic resistance group Hezbollah (Party of God) as a major partner in its coalition. Secular Arab governments in Syria and the northern West Bank are welcoming to Christians. But with an influx of rural Muslim people into formerly Christian areas like Bethlehem, local Christians sometimes feel hostility from their newly arrived neighbors.

Insecurity in the Holy Land, along with Israel's efforts to bring East Jerusalem and parts of the West Bank and its resources, especially water, still more completely under its own control, has made life ever more difficult for Palestinians, both Christians and Muslims. A government in Jerusalem with key ministries under control of the settlers' movement has led to more burdensome policies not only for local Arab Christians but also for international church workers and the institutions they serve.

### Comprehensive, Regional Peace

In 2010, building a peace in the Middle East hospitable to Christians will require action on three fronts: 1) care for refugees; 2) reciprocity in interreligious relations; and 3) an Arab-Israeli peace accord.

*Refugees.* Adequate provision must be made for supporting the unrecognized masses of refugees, Christian and Muslim, across the region. For Western donors, investing in refugee care, return or resettlement and integration will be a far better investment in peace than subsidizing more arms for the governments of the region. Despite vast sums given for armaments and development over many years, hundreds of thousands of refugees in the shadows eke out an existence off the official rolls.

The refugees' human dignity demands that countries of origin, host countries and the international community find ways to provide for their sustenance, health care and education. In addition, a route must be found to their full integration as citizens in their old home country or a new one. Work on a framework treaty on refugees should not wait until there is agreement on settlement of specific conflicts, especially the Israeli-Palestinian one, but should serve as an aid to concluding a regional agreement.

*Reciprocity in Interreligious Relations.* Pope Benedict XVI has introduced "reciprocity" as an issue for interreligious dialogue, that is, the recognition and implementation of the same human rights and religious liberty in other countries, especially Muslim ones, that are found in Western countries rooted in the Christian tradition. Peacemaking requires an expansion and intensification of interreligious dialogue in the Middle East at all levels. But without reciprocity the contribution of dialogue to peace

will be frail and inauthentic.

Unless Jews, Christians and Muslims share the same rights as citizens and as members of religious communities, the prejudices and resentments that feed conflict will continue to smolder until conflict breaks out again. Guarantees for religious liberty everywhere should include a special statute upholding the rights of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Jerusalem and the shrines of the Holy Land.

*Regional Peace Accords.* The direct talks between Palestinian and Israeli leaders initiated by the Obama administration are a positive development. A bilateral Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, however, is not enough. The settlement of the Palestinian question must be part of a regional peace agreement, like that proposed by Arab leaders in 2002. Leaders like Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and King Abdullah of Jordan have been helpful in the past. But other neighbors, especially Lebanon and Syria, must be drawn into the process. Both are homes to sizable Christian populations who remain at risk without a regional peace.

In addition, talks should resume along the lines of the Madrid plan of 1991 addressing long-term regional problems, including water, environment, refugees, economic development and arms control with a nuclear-free zone. Peacemaking must reduce the causes of hostility and lay foundations for a shared future. ▲

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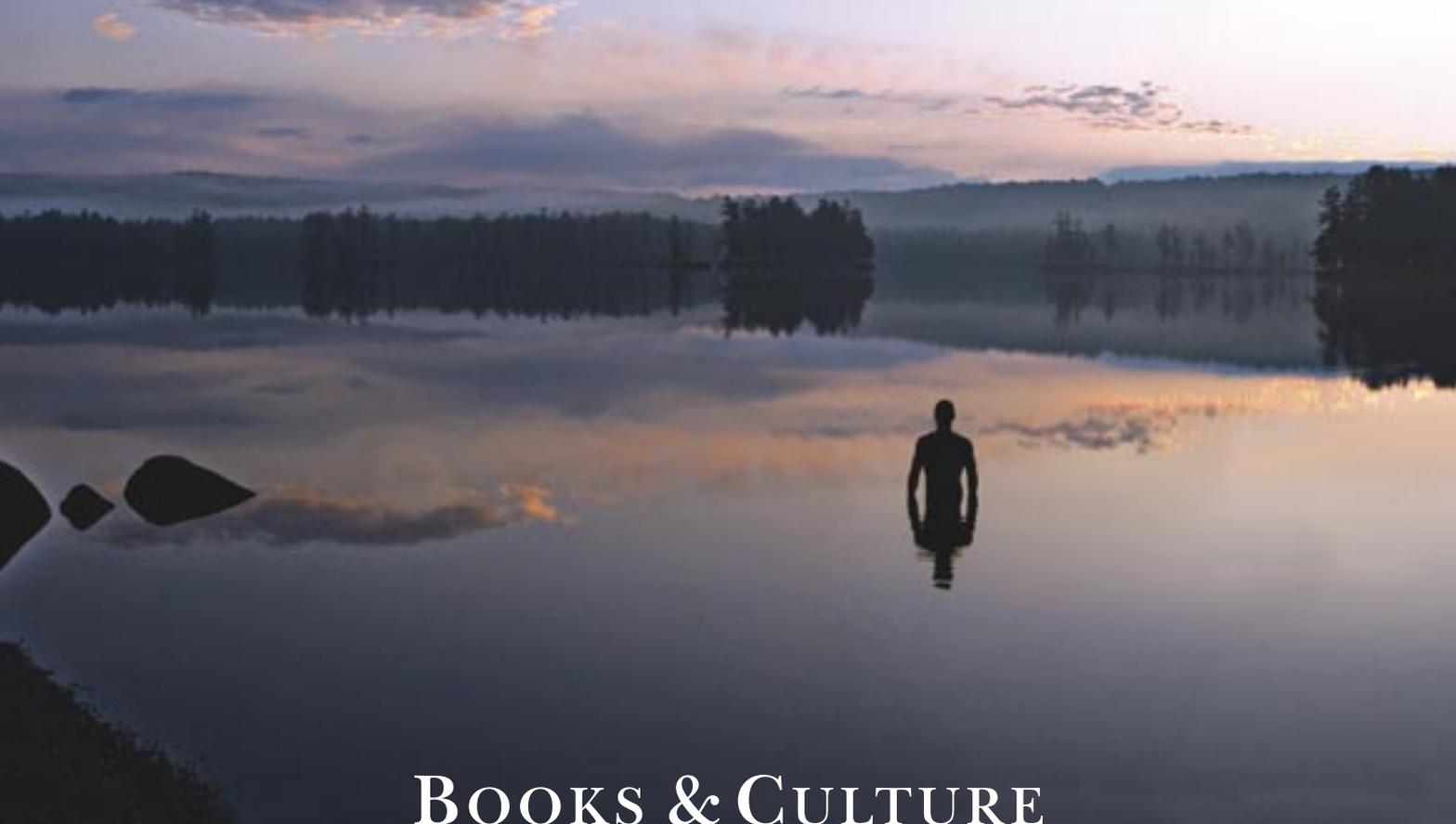
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## BOOKS & CULTURE

TELEVISION | JOHN A. COLEMAN

### FAITH OF A NATION

*PBS's new series 'God in America'*

Anyone who has trawled through the 1,158 pages of Sydney Ahlstrom's magisterial *A Religious History of the American People* cannot help believing that a less hefty volume would miss some central elements of America's many-sided religious experience. The ambitious and extraordinarily well-produced PBS series "God in America" (airing on most stations for six hours, Oct. 11-13) has had to work with severe time constraints. Consequently, while much of importance is included, much is also left out.

Ahlstrom made clear that the iconic role of the New England Puritans, with their symbol of America as "the city on the hill," was not the only early religious impulse in the country. The Puritans, who sought religious free-

doms for themselves, refused them to others, forcing Anne Hutchinson, for example, into banishment for upholding the rights of conscience against the state. Colonies founded by minority religions (like the Quakers in Pennsylvania and the Catholic Lord Calvert in Maryland) opted for religious tolerance among Christians. Roger Williams's bold experiment in Rhode Island was the most radical. It allowed complete liberty of conscience: one could believe or not in this new land. Further south, Anglican establishments were less cocksure than were the Puritans that they were a specially chosen people.

The first segment of "God in America," set in New Spain (currently New Mexico), recounts how the Franciscan friars did not reciprocate Indian hospitality. The Native Americans left room for the new reli-

gion of Christianity, while maintaining their own customary religious dances and rituals. When the Franciscans tried to extirpate what they saw as "pagan" rituals, however, rebellion broke out. A war of the Pueblos against the Spaniards led to the massacre of 21 priests and 400 Spanish colonists. The Pueblos forced the Spanish to flee Santa Fe for El Paso. Later the Spanish general Diego de Vargas returned for revenge but showed more tolerance for the indigenous religious practices, allowing a syncretistic amalgam of Native American and Christian practices.

This initial segment marks the last time we hear about Native American religion in America. Tales of the sending of native children away from reservations to "missionary" schools (Protestant and Catholic) and a subsequent "lost generation," whose knowledge of tribal customs has diminished, are not part of the series. Nor do we hear of attempts by Black Elk (a Catholic deacon) to find a true inculturation of Christianity in and

Above: a scene from "God in America"

PHOTO: JOSEPH CHRISTOFORI

through tribal lore, or of the missionaries' gallant efforts to save tribal languages.

After taking up the war in New Mexico, the Puritans and Anne Hutchinson's trial, the series moves to the role of religion (especially the heartfelt revival preaching of George Whitfield, who traveled thousands of miles to preach to audiences of many dissenting faiths) in preparing ground for the American Revolution. The Revolution won avid support from many religious leaders, who likened their historic battle to the Exodus story of freedom versus slavery. The revolutionaries believed that "the God of Glory is on our side." Part One highlights the debates in Virginia on religious liberty and the important role of the Baptist preacher Isaac Backus in fighting for the abolition of established religion. After the Revolution, Methodist and Baptist preachers followed the immigrants west, preaching famous revivals at Cane Ridge, Ky., and elsewhere. In 1811 alone, one million Americans took part in revivals.

Alexis de Tocqueville, in *Democracy in America*, argued that religion was the first of America's political institutions, since it anchored a civil society alongside the state, which helped volunteerism to flourish. "God in America" shows how between 1840 and 1850 religion influenced many movements: temperance, Native American rights, prison reform, an incipient women's suffrage, abolition of slavery, the implanting of learning through the Sunday School movement and denominational colleges, and the founding of orphanages.

The most extensive treatment of Catholics in this first part focuses on the role of Archbishop John Hughes of New York (called "Dagger John" because of his feisty spirit and the way he signed his name, as a bishop, with a dagger-like cross in front of it). The huge influx of immigrant Irish Catholics into New York, Philadelphia

and Boston led to Know-Nothing riots and the burning of churches and a convent by American nativists. Hughes called on a private Catholic militia to protect his churches from threatened arson. He also championed Irish-Catholic parents who withheld their children from public schools that inculcated an anti-papist Protestant set of courses and prayers. After unsuccessfully seeking a compromise on equal public funding for Catholic schools, as was granted for the so-called public (but actually Protestant) schools, Hughes helped Catholics organize politically to pass legislation banning religion from the public schools. The documentary presents Hughes as a champion of the very religious liberty that Protestants had claimed for themselves. Yet this segment shows only one aspect of a much richer American Catholic history.

The power of this documentary lies mainly in its rich enactment of histor-

ical episodes. Part Two does this magnificently around the figure of Abraham Lincoln and the events of the Civil War.

Initially, Lincoln had an aversion to card-carrying Christians. But as the war ground on, Lincoln, wary of any strong notion of a personal God acting in history, came to wrestle mightily with what was the will of God in this crisis.

The Southern states in their secession constitution invoked the Almighty, calling upon a compact with God. Southern Methodists and Baptists formed their own regional denominations. As Lincoln stated in his second inaugural address: "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God and each invokes his aid against the other. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully." Lincoln's assassination made him, among Christian Americans, a Christ figure whose shed

## America

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blood helped redeem the nation.

Part Two also focuses on the rise of Reform Judaism around the figure of Rabbi Isaac Wise and the split among Jews that took place after Wise's unkosher banquet to celebrate the founding of Hebrew Union Seminary in Cincinnati. It then moves to the disputes between fundamentalists and liberals of the late 19th century and to the struggle between William Jennings Bryan, the "Great Commoner," and Clarence Darrow over evolution at the Scopes trial in 1925.

The final two hours deal with the civil rights movement, Billy Graham and the endeavor to link religion and patriotism in the anti-Communist crusade (with dubious consequences).

The series also takes up the rise of the Moral Majority and the new Christian right and reflects on the rise of a more religiously pluralistic America after 1965, when revised immigration laws brought to our shores

more Muslims, Hindus, Parsis and Buddhists. America has now become a new kind of spiritual marketplace.

Constraints of time force "God in America" to omit some crucial elements of American religious history. There is almost nothing, for example, about h o m e - g r o w n American religious movements like the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Disciples of Christ, Christian Science or the perduring influence of the American Transcendentalist Movement that flowed from Thoreau and Emerson and led to Unitarianism. Nothing is said about the Parliament of World Religions or the earlier immigration of Japanese and Chinese Buddhists or the fact that Muslims were living in the United States long before 1965.

The choice of dramatic re-enactments, visually compelling though

they are, makes it hard to raise other important religious issues. To what extent, for example, does the dramatic statistical rise in unaffiliated or self-declared "no-religion" Americans (16 percent in 2010 compared to just 6 percent in 1990) reflect the political polarization of religion, flowing from the rise of the Christian right? "If

that is what it means to be religious," many say, "I do not want to be that!"

There is a valid argument for viewing America as a spiritual marketplace, with entrepreneurs fending off lazy monopolies and forcing all religions to compete for adherents. But as Alan Wolfe, a sociologist at Boston College, claims, such a religion has become a species of "capacious individualism." We are not nor should we be a "Christian nation," even if most of the population is Christian. Catholics

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Jon Sweeney on the Judaic roots of blessing animals.  
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recall that the epithet “Christian America” often excluded them. The myth of America as a Judeo-Christian civilization no longer holds water either. As De Tocqueville argued, in earlier periods, though beliefs shifted across denominations, there was underlying agreement on a moral civil religion that was quasi-Christian in inspiration. As that has eroded, what can take its place to anchor a consensual view of common citizenship and nationhood? The danger is sheer pluralism, a “naked public square.”

In his brilliant book *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, the sociologist James Davison Hunter argues that in the 21st-century United States, Christianity, despite all its vitalities, is a

weak and “marginalized” culture. Christians have opted for political strategies that equate the public with the political in ways harmful to both religion and politics. Hunter argues for a Christian stance of “faithful presence” in and to a secularized, religiously pluralistic America where one can believe or not, by constitutional warrant.

Watching “God in America,” with its vivid dramatic encounters, left me wanting much more such sociological analysis. The talking heads interspersed throughout are mainly historians who tell very well what happened in history but interpret less well what is taking place now.

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JOHN A. COLEMAN, S.J., is a sociologist and assistant pastor at St. Ignatius Church in San Francisco, Calif.

## BOOKS | WILLIAM J. COLLINGE

# ABIDING PRESENCE

### THE CIRCLE DANCE OF TIME

By John S. Dunne  
Univ. of Notre Dame Press. 164p \$25  
(paperback)

“I take one step at a time,” John Dunne writes, “a paragraph a day, out of the heart, going from insight to insight.” He takes images, mostly from quotations, ponders them, juxtaposes them and returns to them again and again from different points of view, always seeking insight into them. Longtime readers will recognize many of the quotations as having played a part in Dunne’s thought for 30 years and more. At the center of it all is the question of time. The present book, his 18th, is the fifth to contain the word “time” in its title.

Dunne’s question is not Augustine’s “What is time?” It is Walter Benjamin’s “Is time constitutive?”—is time all there is? Is our lifetime simply

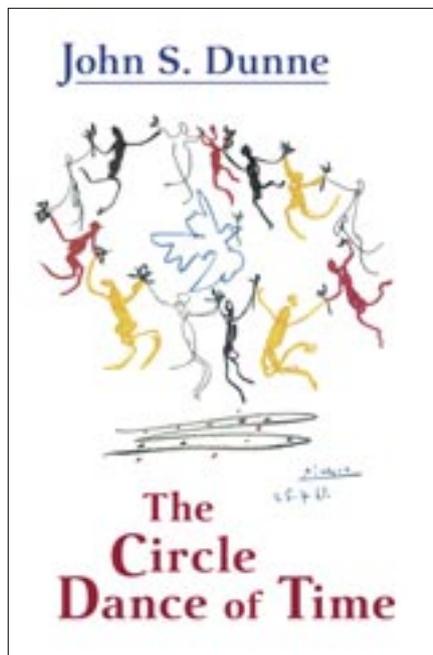
a relentless march to death and humankind’s time merely “destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system,” as Bertrand Russell put it in 1903? Or is time, in a line from Plato

that Dunne loves to quote, “a moving image of eternity”?

Dunne, who teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame, raises a similar question about space. He frequently cites “The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me,” Blaise Pascal’s plaintive expression of the sense of homelessness engendered when early modern science replaced the ancient cosmos—the orderly whole in which our home was at the center—with a limitless, mostly empty space in which we occupy a random, insignificant outpost. Putting the early modern views of space and time together, Russell concluded that so “purposeless, [so] void of meaning, is the world which Science presents for our belief...only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.” We have Steven Weinberg today (“The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless”) to tell us that Russell’s world is the real world. But is it?

Like Pascal, Dunne takes his clue from the very facts that we are terrified, we are tempted to despair, we look for a point, we are not just as indifferent as the universe is said to be. All these things express the voice of the heart—“The heart has its reasons that reason does not know” is Dunne’s other Pascalian starting point. For Dunne, the heart is “the place where thought and feeling meet and unite,” the seat of Augustine’s restlessness for God, the “center of stillness surrounded by silence” that Dag Hammarskjöld says “we all have within us.”

In his opening pages Dunne asks, what if the eternal silence of the universe is the same as the silence of our center of stillness? According to the *Upanishads*, he says, it is: Atman is Brahman, God in the heart and God in the universe are one. Both silences are the surrounding presence of God. But the heart’s desire for eternal life is not satisfied by an awareness of an



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eternal presence that we can touch in our temporal lives.

Christian faith offers us more: the Presence is one we can address as a thou, and in Christ it dwells in us, "I in them and thou in me." Christ is Emmanuel, "God with us." But is this only another image, only a way we can construe things? It is at least that; it "is an interpretation, and yet living out that interpretation is a real experience.... If we are faithful to the story of 'God with us,' the surrounding silences will speak." They speak, Dunne says, through a kindling of the heart and an illuminating of the mind, revealing life as a journey with God in time and a relationship with God in Christ that "is capable of passing through death and surviving it."

Dunne initially titled this book *Faith Seeking Understanding*, a phrase from St. Anselm that often serves as a definition of theology. Faith, Dunne quotes Pascal, is "God sensible to the heart"—our relationship with God felt in the kindling and the illuminating—and "if you enter into the relationship yourself, you will understand." Dunne is indeed doing theology, although of a unique kind, as he ponders the Christian images of "God with us" and the modern images of a world from which God seems absent, seeking the insights that will reveal the abiding presence of God. He changed the title, however, to *The Circle Dance of Time*, taking an image from the Greek philosopher Plotinus of the soul and the universe circling their center in God or the One. Life and time, too, are a dance in the great circle of the love that is "from God, and of God, and toward God," as Dunne quotes the words of a Bedouin to Lawrence of Arabia. In this vision, life is a going out from God and a return, but always a "journey with God." The universe, too, goes out in emanation, as Plotinus says, and returns in evolution, as Teilhard de Chardin says, without ever losing its relationship to God in

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creation. "Secularism is a temptation on the far swing from God," Dunne writes, as the circle passes through loneliness, darkness and death; and it can be answered by attentiveness to God, trusting "God with us" to lead us through illumination of the mind and kindling of the heart.

Dunne does not mention it, but Plotinus has another image of a choric dance, only this time a turtle wanders into it. It does not go well for him. Ever since I read that passage in college, I have identified with the turtle, and reading Dunne reminds me why. Almost every sentence calls on readers to meditate, to ponder images until

insights come, to become aware through these insights of "God with us" in our own hearts, and finally to experience our lives and world as taking part in the great circle of God's love. None of this comes easily to a turtle. Still, if we can read at all, I suppose that we are not real turtles; and, to use the example of Lewis Carroll's Mock Turtle, Dunne invites us to make the effort, even if only a paragraph a day, to share the vision and join the dance.

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**WILLIAM J. COLLINGE** is the Knott Professor of Theology at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Md., and the author of *The A to Z of Catholicism*.

STEPHEN SCHLOESSER

## AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER

### DREYFUS

#### Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century

By Ruth Harris

Metropolitan Books. 560p \$35

Although the Dreyfus Affair may be unfamiliar to some Americans, it was a vital moment in French history, and its significance for modern Catholicism cannot be overstated. The court-martial in 1894-95 of Colonel Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer, and his imprisonment on Devil's Island inaugurated an era of intensified Catholic-Republican strife. Rage against Dreyfus's wrongful conviction and right-wing anti-Semitism would lead to political victories for a unified left.

These in turn enabled the passage of anticlerical legislation between 1901 and 1905 that radically transformed the face of the Catholic Church in France: religious orders were expelled, Catholic schools were closed, diplomatic relations with the Vatican were severed and church and state were divorced. In several ways, the affair raised questions that would

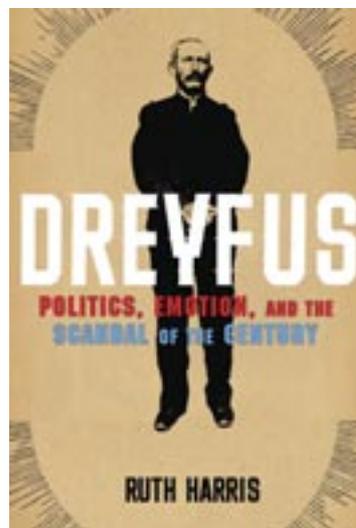
find resolution for Catholics only a half-century later at the Second Vatican Council: the legitimacy of democracy, affirmation of religious liberty and the condemnation of anti-Semitism.

Ruth Harris's contribution to the vast bibliography of the affair is both deeply engaging and highly original. She has self-consciously taken the standard melodramatic narrative (which she herself learned as a child in Hebrew school) and transformed its stock figures—virtuous "seculars" and villainous "Catholics"—into rounded complex characters. In her version, campaigners' loyalties, both pro and anti-Dreyfusard, were not determined in advance. Rather, contingent factors, conflicting motives and carefully calculated choices all played their parts. Just as there were no monolithic

"seculars," so too there were no monolithic "Catholics."

By patiently unraveling and laying out the pieces of a vast fin-de-siècle tapestry, Harris tells at least three new stories. The first blurs the divide between "science" and the "irrational." In the conventional account, Dreyfusards were politically active "intellectuals" (an appellation they themselves invented), largely occupying positions in academic natural and social science departments, rationally battling the irrational forces of superstitious and largely Catholic "anti-intellectuals." Extending insights that already appeared in her book *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (1999), Harris revises this account and shows that the divide was hardly so distinct. Both sides embraced evolution, both were fascinated by myth, magic, spiritualism and the occult, and both engaged the role of the "unconscious" in mass politics.

A second new story unfolds as Harris explores the "history of emotions," a return to the "seemingly inchoate world of feeling that is difficult to interpret." Although the Dreyfus Affair has been typically portrayed as the inevitable and necessary triumph of dispassionate reason over superstition, it was in fact nothing if not the quintessential history of rage, a case study in what Freud termed the "narcissism of marginal difference." Harris's earlier work on fin-de-siècle *Murders and Madness* (1989) assists here as she assembles a panoply of prejudices, deep-seated fears and other violent impulses. Feelings also played constructive roles, including the affectionate friendships that forged the Dreyfusard coalition. Among the most poignant episodes is



the tragically bitter and rancorous unraveling of this coalition. The affair dragged on, idealized infatuations wore thin and deep-seated differences cracked open beneath the surface of solidarity.

Finally, a third story blurs boundaries between religion and “modernity.” Standard accounts over the past century have portrayed the affair as an archetypal moment in and a master script of the secularization process. By contrast, Harris’s account is more adequate to our present sensibilities, a scholarly reconsideration informed by religion’s resurgence in the public sphere since at least 1979. As both Dreyfusards and their opponents “borrowed across the science/religion divide,” the affair now suggests not so much religion’s marginalization as its pervasiveness around 1900. In retrospect, religion played an integral role in the context of

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“modernity.”

In her preface, Harris acknowledges that not all readers will embrace this revision. She reports that as her investigation proceeded, she became aware she would “transgress taboos by examining the impact of Dreyfusard anti-Semitism on the Affair and for highlighting the way some Dreyfusards came to promote a repressive vision of Republican orthodoxy.” Harris’s

esteem for the Dreyfusards is not diminished; nor does she downplay their painful experience. However, she suggests that it led them to compromise their own Enlightenment and Liberal humanitarian ideals. The anti-clerical campaigns and construction of the radically laicist state thus appear not as the moral triumph of reason and “modernity” but as ideological intolerance and a desire to persecute.

In her epilogue, and more extensively in a recent essay (“How the Dreyfus Affair Explains Sarkozy’s Burqa Ban,” *Foreign Policy*, 5/12) that has stirred considerable debate on the Internet, Harris applies her interpretation to France’s current debates over Muslim women’s wearing of the burqa. She sees in desires to ban the burqa not so much an application of Enlightenment universalism as of the laicist intolerance made possible by the affair.

*Dreyfus* takes the reader on a riveting ride that has the added advantage of being true. The players are not lessened by being less cardboard and more complex; they are magnified and more sympathetic. Virtuous and villainous acts, less determined and more deliberate, also become more of what they are, more edifying in some cases and more contemptible in others. It is an all too human story.

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**STEPHEN SCHLOESSER, S.J.**, *associate professor of history at Boston College, is the author of Jazz Age Catholicism (2005).*

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America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 13 combined issues: Jan. 4-11, 18-25, Feb. 1-8, April 12-19, June 7-14, 21-28, July 5-12, 19-26, Aug. 2-9, 16-23, Aug. 30-Sept. 6, Sept. 13-20, Dec. 20-27) by America Press, Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodicals postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Business Manager: Lisa Pope; Circulation: Judith Palmer, (212) 581-4640. Subscriptions: United States, \$56 per year; add U.S. \$30 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. \$54 per year for international priority airmail. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, 106 West 56th St. New York, NY 10019. Printed in the U.S.A.

# LETTERS

## The Model Gentleman

"Conspiracy of Bishops and Faithful," by Drew Christiansen, S.J. (9/27), reminds me that the 19th-century prose and even the poetry of John Henry Newman may be a little hard for today's readers to digest. But to read him, even to meditate on his seamless logic, introduces 21st-century folks to a methodology sadly lacking in church conversation. Furthermore, this man cannot help but give us the model of the "gentlemanly" (today we might say more civil) mode of reaching sound doctrine and practice. Great strides have made the Catholic Church a more universal believers' church. Much remains to be done. At present the constructive contribution of the laity still seems to be voluntary rather than organic and systematic. Newman's future canonization may be a stimulus in the latter direction.

JOHN HUNT  
*Pompano Beach, Fla.*

## Protecting the Club

In response to "How Will They Know?" (9/13), I am among those who have left the church, three years ago. I was 59. With no voice in the church, I could no longer sit in the pew and write the checks that support the hierarchy and all its misdeeds. I realized that I was an enabler. If there had been one sign in Rome that bishops would be held accountable for hiding the criminal acts of sexual predators, there would have been some hope. But those who live in luxury in Rome and chanceries around the world have more concern for their own lifestyles and protecting the members of their club than they have for children and

teenagers preyed upon by priests under their supervision. This is the church that has some of the most powerful teachings on social justice; but when it comes to themselves, it's all empty words.

ANNE CHAPMAN  
*Arlington, Va.*

## Three Questions?

Bravo for Archbishop Timothy Dolan's "The Schools We Need" (9/13)! But what is missing right now is a united national campaign to take the idea forward. Would this bring the hierarchy and the laity together as a church? Has not our parochial approach hindered us in an era that requires more innovation in telling our story in the mass media? Could the national campaign lay the groundwork for informed servant leaders in decades to come?

FRANCIS J. BUTLER  
*Washington, D.C.*

## Fight for Vouchers

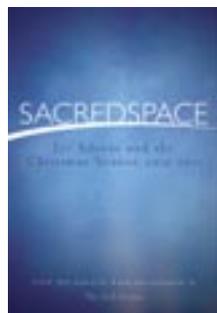
I thoroughly enjoyed Archbishop Dolan's defense of Catholic schools (9/13). But the weakness of his plan is that he does not explain where the money will come from. His statement that surely "American Catholics have the wealth and imagination" doesn't cut it in terms of a realistic plan to tackle the problem. In suburbs, middle-class families pay high taxes for bloated school budgets. How can they pay these taxes and still send their children to Catholic schools? The only solution is to go back to fighting for vouchers. We must argue that closing our schools and sending these students to public schools will be an impossible cost increase for the local taxpayer.

EDWARD THOMPSON  
*Farmingdale, N.Y.*

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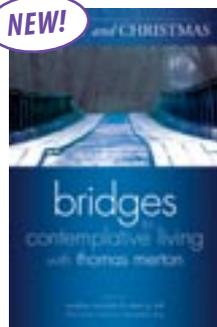
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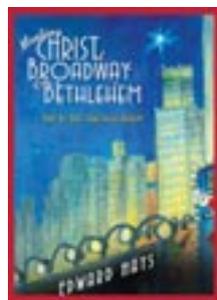


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## Are Words Enough?

As I read Jeannine Hill Fletcher's review (9/27) of *Comparative Theology*, by Francis X. Clooney, S.J., one of the hardest things for me to understand was the depth of the split between Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church. I have come to the tentative conclusion that it has little to do with theology, but it does have something to do with the authority models adopted by either side (apparently different interpretations of tradition) and a healthy portion of almost tribal nationalism. Is it possible for even the most exhaustive study of the texts revered by each side to shed light on all these influences?

C. R. ERLINGER  
San Antonio, Tex.

## Horse Dust

Kyle T. Kramer's column "Horse Sense" (9/27) suggests that horses, since they operate on solar energy and deposit a waste product that fertilizes the farm, are more energy efficient than cars and other machines. There is another interpretation of the same phenomenon: Horses leave droppings. When dry, they turn to dust, which carries disease. The horseless carriage was a healthy development.

RICHARD KNUEBBING  
Kennesaw, Ga.

## Night and Day

The Of Many Things column by George M. Anderson, S.J., on Dorothy Day (9/27) reminds me of hearing about the Catholic Worker movement 40 years ago. Otherwise I knew nothing about her. It is all my loss. What a wonderful woman! So human, just like me; so holy, as I hope to be, now an old man but still striving toward that elusive goal. In the 1940s there was a love song with the words, "Under the hide of me, there's a burning, yearning, deep down inside of me." That song sums up her life in her love for Jesus and the poor.

BRUCE SNOWDEN  
Bronx, N.Y.

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# Persistent Pursuit of Justice

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), OCT. 17, 2010

Readings: Ex 17:8-13; Ps 121:1-8; 2 Tm 3:14-4:2; Lk 18:1-8

*“Be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient” (2 Tm 4:2)*

Now 91 years old, Frances Crowe has for 65 years been protesting against war and advocating for peace, human rights and environmental justice. She has been arrested and imprisoned for leading public demonstrations more times than she can remember. This diminutive widow never tires of her persistent pursuit of justice. She seems the very embodiment of the widow in today’s Gospel.

Luke has framed the parable with introductory and concluding verses that were likely not part of the original parable Jesus told (preserved in vv. 2-5). The parable begins with the introduction of two characters: a judge, who twice declares he has no fear of God and no respect for any human being; and a widow, who comes to him over and over and over, day after day after day, insisting that justice be done. The imperfect tense of the verbs indicates repeated action; she comes again and again and will not give up until she receives a just verdict.

We can picture her going back to the courtroom every day, raising her voice in protest, calling out to the judge, telling him he might as well listen to her today because if not, she’ll be back tomorrow. She sees people with influence and money being attended to, while her only recourse is

her voice and her presence. She breaks the stereotype of how widows are generally regarded.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures there is a repeated admonition to care for widows, along with orphans and strangers, the most vulnerable people in the society (e.g., Dt 24:17-21).

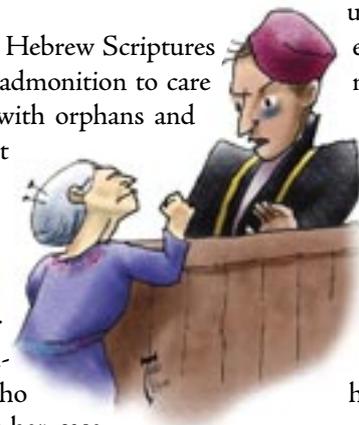
This widow should be cared for by her nearest male relative, and it is he who should be pleading her case before the judge. Instead, the widow intrepidly enters into space usually reserved for males and will not give up until justice is accomplished.

The judge is impervious to her pleas. He continues to ignore her until he can no longer stand her insistent protests. He has not been changed; he still insists he has no fear of God nor respect for persons, but he finally relents because he is afraid she will haul off and give him a black eye! The verb *hypopiazein* in verse five is often translated metaphorically as “wear me out,” but it is a boxing term that literally means “to strike under the eye” (see also 1 Cor 9:27). It is a hilarious image: a supposedly powerful judge cowering in front of a seemingly powerless little widow.

The humorous vignette, however, conveys a very serious message: It is through persistence and tireless actions of nonviolent confrontation that justice is attained. More often than not, this happens through the

repeated actions of seemingly inconsequential people who never give up. In a patriarchal world it is expected that the powerful male figure will be the God-like character. But in this parable it is the widow who embodies the divine insistence on justice and who most resembles Jesus’ manner of tirelessly preaching and acting to bring it about.

Persistent prayer goes hand in hand with persistent



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How does your faithfulness to prayer embolden you for persistent actions for justice?
- Who holds you up when you become weary? Whom do you hold up?
- How do you use the power of your voice and your presence in advocating for justice?

action for justice. In order to sustain the constant struggle for peace, the heart and mind must be continually transformed by the One who is our source of peace. The first reading reminds us that this is not a solitary effort. Like Moses, we need companions to hold up our arms when we grow weary, and like Frances Crowe, we need to engage other faithful friends in our persistent actions for justice. Fearless, because she has nothing to lose, she vows, “as long as I have energy I’m going to keep at it.”

**BARBARA E. REID**

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

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