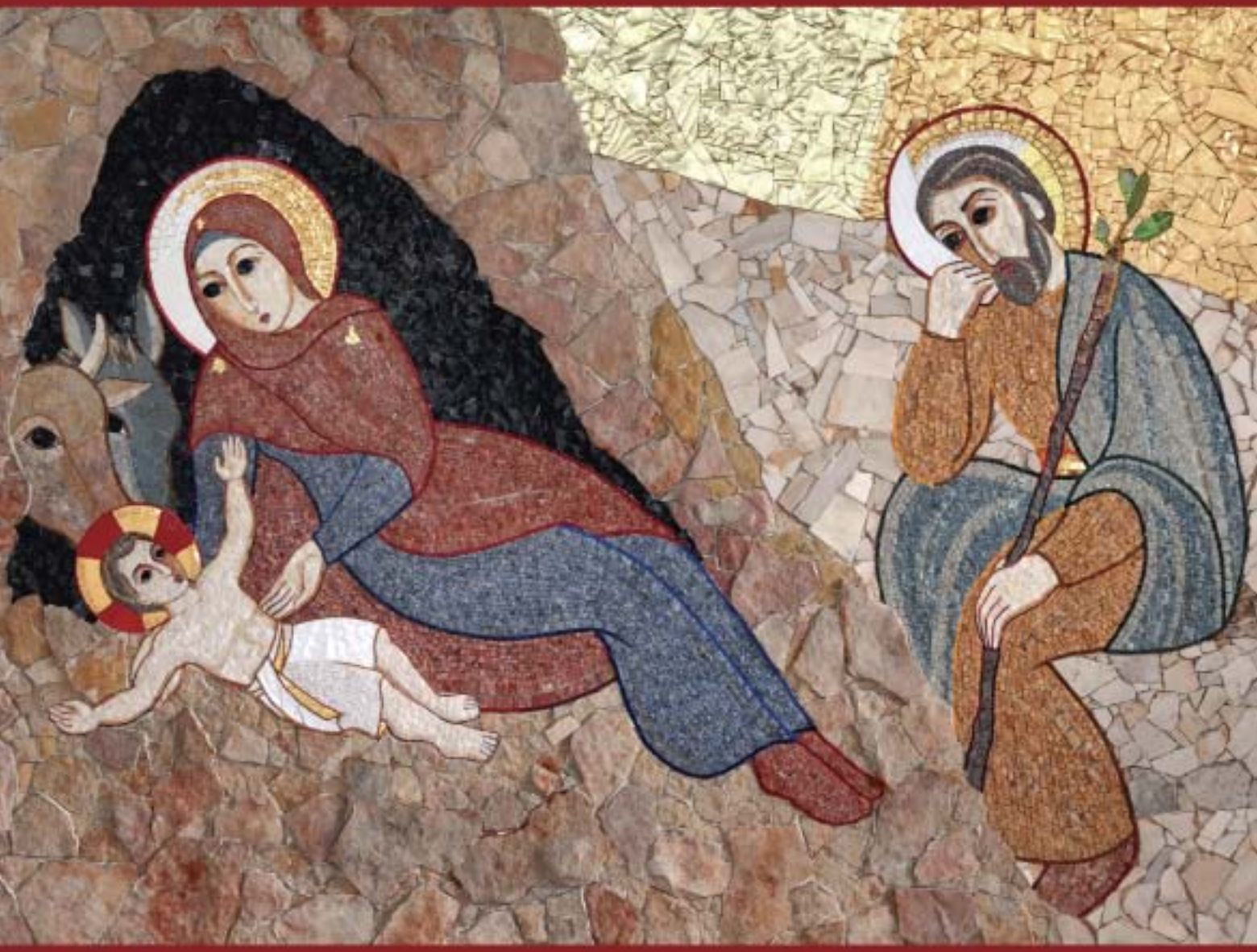
America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

DEC. 20-27, 2010 $3.50



Christmas 2010

OF MANY THINGS

Raised Protestant, I never had nuns as teachers in grade school. In fact, it was only after becoming Catholic at 30 that I began to gain a sense of their remarkable contributions. After I became a Jesuit, many of the sisters I met became personal friends. Among them is a member of the Sisters of Mercy, Eileen Hogan, whom I initially met through our shared prison chaplaincy work at Rikers Island. Eileen later went on to found Womencare, a mentoring organization that ministers to women leaving prison. In 2002 she and another Mercy sister began the Sister to Sister: All Africa AIDS Conference, a program that enables African women religious to gather and empower one another to develop strategies to address the H.I.V./AIDS pandemic that is ravaging sub-Saharan Africa. She and Sister Farley recently returned from Cameroon and Uganda after one of their several annual trips to Africa.

Sister Hogan's congregation is representative of the many highlighted in an exhibit at Ellis Island, "Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America." It documents their achievements since first arriving here centuries ago. Immigrants themselves, they found a not always welcoming land where nativist sentiment viewed them, along with priests, as tools of Rome. Many faced severe hardships. Rose Philippine Duchesne, of the Society of the Sacred Heart, for example, arrived in Missouri from France in 1818, sailing up the Mississippi River to St. Louis and then settling in St. Charles. With slender resources, she and other immigrant nuns often literally had to beg for essentials in the way of food and shelter.

African-American sisters are also represented in the exhibit. The founder of one congregation, Mother Elizabeth Lange, a refugee from Haiti's revolutionary violence, began the Oblates of Providence in Baltimore in 1829. When the superior of the Sulpician priests there asked her to send sisters to help at the seminary, she spoke in her reply of "the difficulty of our time as persons of color and religious at the same time." In that early 19th-century period, the sisters were often insulted on Baltimore's streets despite their religious garb.

During the Civil War, religious women played a major role in caring for wounded soldiers. The Daughters of Charity, for example, ran the federal government's Saterlee Hospital in Philadelphia. A photo shows three dozen of them in front of the building, with a Union soldier at either side of the group. One wounded soldier, perhaps puzzled by the winged wimple of the nun caring for him said, "I don't care what you are, but you're a mother to me."

The ministries of modern sisters are represented in the exhibit, too. We see a photo of several walking together in the 1965 march in Selma, Ala. One is Sister Antona Ebo, a Franciscan, who is quoted in a photo caption: "I am here because I am a negro, a nun and a Catholic and because I want to bear witness"—as indeed she and many others continue to do. We also see a photo of Dorothy Stang, a Sister of Notre Dame murdered in Brazil in 2005 defending the rights of indigenous people exploited by land-grabbers.

During my visit to the third-floor space, visitors of varying ages prayerfully made their way around the exhibits. But two who stood out for me were elderly sisters in simple dark blue dresses, standing before one of the enlarged photos, smiling as they pointed out to each other nuns they knew personally.

With the current anti-immigrant sentiment, the work of many nuns on behalf of the undocumented and other rejected people has become more important than ever. Whatever their varied ministries, sisters have been a gift to the world—a blessing to be remembered during this Christmas season.

GEORGE M. ANDERSON, S.J.

America

Published by Jesuits of the United States

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

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

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

Cover: The Nativity from the mosaic by Marko Rupnik, S.J., in the Blessed Sacrament chapel at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn. Photo: Tracy Deer-Mirek

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www.americamagazine.org VOL. 203 NO. 19, WHOLE NO. 4917 DECEMBER 20-27, 2010

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Note: In keeping with its usual practice, ***America's*** *publication schedule changes during December and January. Coming issues will appear on Jan. 3-10-17, 2011, and Jan. 24-31, 2011. Weekly publication resumes on Feb. 7, 2011.*

ON THE WEB

Our video reflection series for **Advent and Christmas** continues. Plus, a slideshow of **Marko Rupnik's mosaics**, and a review of the film **"Black Swan."**
All at americamagazine.org.

Welcome to the Cafeteria

The denunciations of Pope Benedict came swiftly. "Our Holy Father should stop talking about aberrant sex and talk more about Jesus." The pope should not speak on matters "in which he possesses no particular competence." Or more simply, "I think the pope is wrong." Guess where these comments are from: some left-wing, fringe Catholics? No; these statements were made by conservative Catholics angered by the pope's comments about the use of condoms as a "first step" in the moral decision-making of a person infected with H.I.V./AIDS who does not want to pass along the illness. The first is from Christine Vollmer, president of the Alliance for the Family; the second from Luke Gormally, professor at Ave Maria School of Law in Ann Arbor, Mich.; the last, on the pope's wrongness, from John Haas, M.D., director of the National Catholic Bioethics Center.

It is common to call liberal-leaning Catholics "cafeteria Catholics" for allegedly picking and choosing among papal pronouncements and church teachings that require their adherence. But those on the right are equally likely to struggle in accepting individual positions. During the Iraq War, when Pope John Paul II forcefully opposed American intervention, many conservative Catholics ignored the pope's warnings, averring that when it came to war, one could set aside papal statements. They should have listened to John Paul. Though most right-leaning Catholics profess vigorous support for "life issues," they hold back when it comes to AIDS prevention, which, like war, is a life issue. The cafeteria, filled with Catholics trying to balance the demands of their consciences with church teaching, grows more crowded by the day.

Retrieving Stolen Art

Much looted art remains lost to its rightful owners, a circumstance going back hundreds of years. Retrievals and losses mark both present and past. "Allegory of Earth and Water," by Jan Breughel the Younger, was recently returned to Canada's Concordia University by the Dutch government. Max Stern, a Jewish art dealer, had owned it; but he closed his gallery under pressure from the Nazis and fled to Canada, abandoning hundreds of works. On Stern's death in 1987, what remained of his collection went to Concordia. Though "Allegory of Earth and Water" was the eighth painting to be returned to the university, the Netherlands is the first and only European government to have returned one of his works. Concordia's president has noted that although 10 percent of Stern's missing artworks have now been located, current owners—including governments—have resisted returning them. The Netherlands stands out as a commendable exception.

Some museums remain culprits in holding on to stolen art. Egypt is currently demanding the return of a golden burial mask, discovered in 1952. It is now on view in the St. Louis Museum of Art. And the Elgin marbles, which Lord Elgin paid to have shipped from the Parthenon 200 years ago, are in the British Museum; but Greece is the country of their origin. Despite claims and counterclaims, stolen artworks, however long ago the theft, should be sent home.

Out of the Woods?

Do the improving fortunes of U.S. not-for-profits suggest that the nation's economic bad times may be nearing an end? The results of a recent Guidestar survey are at least encouraging. The percentage of public charities and private foundations reporting improved contributions jumped to 36 percent in October 2010 from 23 percent last October, while the percentage of survey participants who reported lower donations declined from 51 percent to 37 percent. The improvement could augur the beginning of an economic recovery in the nonprofit sector.

The significance of these numbers may be a little unclear. The uptick in donations could just reflect deeper digging into the nation's deepest pockets, not a significant improvement at the individual level, broadly speaking. After all, the nation's wealthiest citizens did very well last year, even as high unemployment persisted. And for the eighth consecutive year, a majority (68 percent) of survey participants reported increased demand for their organizations' services, suggesting that even as overall contributions may be stabilizing, institutional resources may be burning up at a higher rate next year.

Indeed, Catholic Charities USA's Third Quarter Snapshot survey provides no excuse for complacency. C.C.USA agencies nationwide reported a growing number of requests for assistance from the working poor (up 81 percent), families (up 71 percent), seniors and immigrants (both up 48 percent) and homeless people (up 45 percent). The scramble to close state budget deficits next year will lead to a deep cut in funding for social service agencies like C.C.USA and to layoffs of public employees. We hope the nation's not-for-profit sector and specifically its direct service providers continue to see improvements in contributions through 2011 and 2012. They, and the rest of us, are going to need them.

Christmas Present

It seems to many that the true spirit of Christmas disappeared from American life some time ago. The traditional manger, with shepherds and angels adoring the infant Savior, is no longer seen in department store windows, and when one appears in a public space, it quickly becomes an occasion for litigation. Offering the traditional greeting "Merry Christmas" has become an affirmative act of Christian self-identification. In advertising and casual conversation it has been replaced by "Happy Holidays," because, though the vast majority of Americans profess to be Christians, in this age of interfaith sensibilities Christmas shares billing with Hanukkah and Kwanzaa.

All the religious feasts of the season, however, are swallowed up in a consumerist frenzy of spending. Economists and broadcast journalists take the fiscal pulse of the nation by counting off the length of the shopping line at Best Buy on Black Friday. The biblical Christmas stories have been replaced by "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" and "Frosty the Snowman." Even Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life," which attempted to redeem the spirit of generosity, in tune with the Gospel message, from the grasp of unregulated capitalism, has been replaced as a Christmas ritual by the nonstop broadcast of Jean Shepherd's satirical film "A Christmas Story." Culturally there is no doubt the Christian Christmas has been displaced, subverted and buried under a mountain of commercial trivialities and cultural kitsch.

It would be comforting, of course, if the wider culture re-enforced our faith and if pious Christian customs, like manger scenes and caroling, had broader appeal. The crass secularization of the season, however, could well spur us to reflection on a kind of spiritual asceticism that renounces unchallenging sentimentalism about Christmases past. For appropriating the Gospel spirit of identifying with the poor, as presented throughout Luke's narrative, or with the persecuted and refugees, as in Matthew's account of the flight into Egypt, is far more important for Christians than preserving reassuring public images of the Nativity.

Such attitudes are also more in keeping with the Evangelists' intentions than the re-presentation of their narratives. Neither Mark's Gospel nor John's contains an infancy narrative, and John' s majestic prologue—"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us"—focuses on the mystery of the Incarnation and our share in its blessings. If we feel deprived by the vapid secularity of "the holidays," we would do well to consider instead how we who belong to the body of Christ can extend the grace of the Incarnation to our contemporary world.

PHOTO: CNS/COURTESY OF MICHAEL D. O'BRIEN

Knowing that every person shares in the grace of the Incarnation, how should we celebrate? First, let us rejoice that God is with us, not just at Christmas but at all times, and that there is no corner of the world in which Christ is not present. The rest of the answer will be found in the morning headlines and evening television news from Afghanistan, Haiti and the Sudan. We will find it in a walk through the soup kitchens, homeless shelters and crime-ridden neighborhoods of our hometowns. There we will find, as Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., wrote, "Christ plays in ten thousand faces/ lovely in limb and lovely in eyes not his." Our hearts will tell us what to do next. It is in our service of the world, in our defense of human rights, in our welcoming of migrants, in the promotion of forgiveness and the fostering of unity among peoples that the power of the Incarnation courses through today's world.

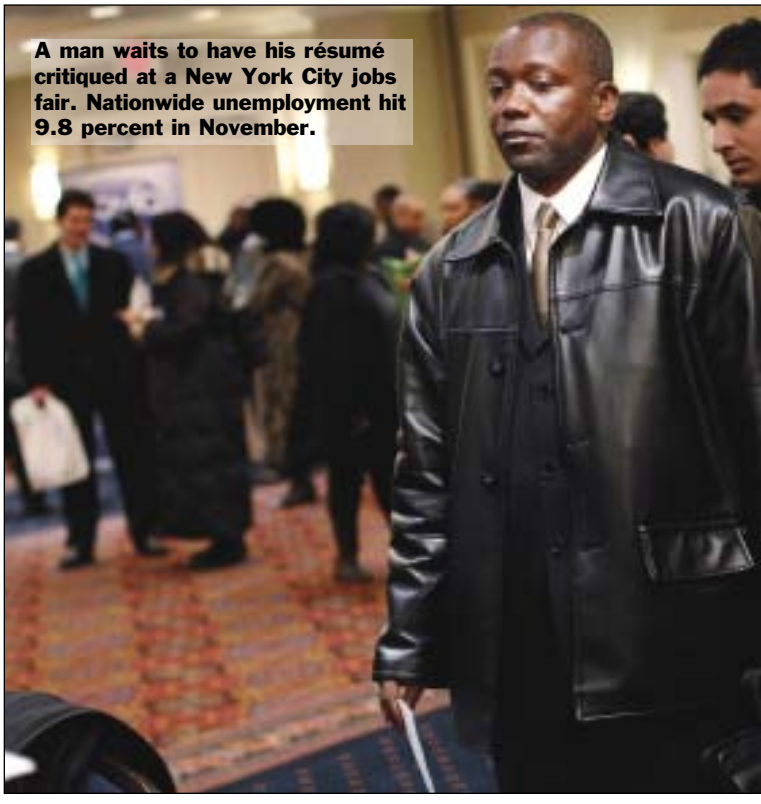
At the same time, we should not neglect works of imagination that attempt to infuse the popular mind with the Christmas spirit. When Charles Dickens wrote "A Christmas Carol," he intended to redeem the bleak work ethic of Victorian England with a renewal of Christian charity, just as in the wake of the Great Depression Frank Capra sought with "It's a Wonderful Life" to revive a sense of community and the common good. Transforming imaginations is integral to incarnation. We who are the church—especially artists, writers, filmmakers, advertisers and broadcasters—need to do today what Dickens and Capra did for their times.

New campaigns of evangelization should enlist artists of every sort and utilize every new medium to spread the good news. Christian artists and communicators must find one another and imagine ways to communicate God's love in an urban, digital culture, as St. Francis did with his crèche in the pastoral Italy of his day. Those with other talents should offer financial support and patronage to the promotion of new Christian art.

Even as we live out the Incarnation in charity and social commitment, through our creativity and inventiveness, Christians need to retell the Christmas story in ways that awaken the hearts of today's Scrooges to the meaning of Christmas present.

U.S. CONGRESS

U.S.C.C.B. Agenda Takes Flight as Session Ends



A man waits to have his résumé critiqued at a New York City jobs fair. Nationwide unemployment hit 9.8 percent in November.

The lame duck session of the 111th Congress was more fair than foul, at least as far as the 2010 domestic agenda of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is concerned. Kathy Saile, the U.S.C.C.B.'s director of domestic social development, said, "We're batting a thousand" on the issues that the bishops have been supporting in recent months.

As the number of unemployed topped 15 million in November, an extension of unemployment benefits was a U.S.C.C.B. priority that appears to have survived high-level horse trading over the temporary continuation of Bush-era tax cuts. The deal brokered by President Obama and Republican leaders has infuriated some Democrats even as it protected a handful of U.S.C.C.B. policy goals, continuing child tax credits and expanding the reach of the Earned Income Tax Credit program. If the agreement is approved by Congress, E.I.T.C. will maintain its refundability to low-income earners who paid little or no federal taxes and it will keep a higher income threshold before it is phased out for married couples.

On Dec. 2 Congress passed another piece of legislation supported by the conference, the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. The child nutrition bill expands school-lunch eligibility and better funds the program. It also sets new quality standards with an eye to combating the growing phenomenon of child obesity and encouraging America's children to eat healthier food. Saile said passing the nutrition act had been of deep concern to the bishops since the school lunch is "for some kids their only meal of the day."

Saile's only reservation about the revised program concerns its "robbing Peter to pay Paul" funding scheme. Just under half of the money for the $4.5 billion program has been allocated from cuts in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps). Saile called it a "terrible precedent" to fund one nutrition program by cuts in another. The SNAP cuts are not scheduled to take effect until 2014, and President Obama has assured House Democrats that by then SNAP money will be restored from a funding source to be named later.

The 111th Congress closes on Jan. 3, 2011, but some hope remains that it will address two other issues of keen interest to the bishops' conference before it shuts its doors for the last time: passage of the Dream Act and approval of the New Start agreement to reduce nuclear arms in the Russian and U.S. arsenals. The Dream Act allows young people brought into the United States as children without documentation to continue their education after high school and eventually legalize their residency. On the revival of Start nuclear weapons reductions, Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany, chair of the bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, has twice in December exhorted Congress to approve the treaty. The pact, signed on April 8 by President Obama and President Dmitri A. Medvedev of Russia, reduces each nation's stockpile of nuclear weapons to 1,500 strategic warheads. "I think it would be a grave mistake to miss this opportunity for our nation," Bishop Hubbard said.

According to Saile, job creation and making moral sense out of the federal budget will be the major preoccupations of the bishops' conference in the next Congress. "The budget is a moral document," she said, "It shows what our priorities are and what we care about." She said the U.S.C.C.B. will be keenly following budget discussions to see that the interests of the nation's poor and vulnerable are not forgotten.

From CNS and other sources.

AFRICA JOURNAL

Surviving the Lord's Resistance Army in S. Sudan

When Justin Isa escaped from the Lord's Resistance Army in 2004, he bore scars on his back from being beaten with machetes. Yet he also bore raw inner wounds from his 10 months in the L.R.A., a Ugandan rebel group turned transnational terror force.

Isa was forced to participate in the killing of other abducted children whom L.R.A. commanders did not trust or wished to punish. Sometimes the orders came directly from Joseph Kony, the spirit medium turned military commander now wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for crimes against humanity.

"In the evening [Kony] leads prayer, quoting from the Bible, and after the prayer he predicts people's lives, he describes people's sins," Isa remembered. "He would move among us and touch us. Sometimes when he touches you, it's to promote you. He'd say, 'This is a good person.' With others, he would touch you and say you were useless or thinking negative thoughts about the movement. Those people were immediately taken outside, and he would point to another boy, any boy, and order him to go kill the other boy. You killed them with the machete," Isa recalled.

The young man said he was constantly afraid. "If you talk about escaping and the other person tries to flee and is caught, he will be tortured and will give them other names, including yours," Isa said. "So you keep quiet, and keep your thoughts about escaping to yourself."

Isa finally did escape when his unit was attacking a village near the northern city of Gulu, Uganda. He was turned over to the United Nations and received some counseling from a church group. Isa's return to his family's thatched-roof hut in a refugee camp was dramatic. His mother had been informed that he was dead, and when she saw him alive, according to Isa, "she went crazy" and has never recovered.

In 2008, Isa and his family returned to southern Sudan, where he works in a church-sponsored agricultural project in Riimenze, a village about 22 miles outside Yambio in Southern Sudan's Western Equatoria state. The area has suffered repeated L.R.A. attacks in recent years, and he is afraid of being abducted again. If that happens, he will likely be executed as a deserter.

Isa's greatest fear, however, is not of his former captors, but rather of the family of another boy who was kidnapped with him. Isa said that the day after their abduction, one boy managed to escape, but he was quickly recaptured. L.R.A. commanders forced Isa and the other children to crush him to death as punishment. When the dead boy's family learned how the killing took place, they swore to take revenge on Isa and the other boys. So as southern Sudan votes in January on independence and a step toward peace or, some fear, renewed violence, Isa is always looking over his shoulder.

"I feel good that peace is coming to southern Sudan, but there's no peace for me," he said. "I can't enjoy it. I have nightmares about what I lived through. I'm afraid of the L.R.A.; and if I go home, I have to worry about people who don't like me. I have to worry they're going to come get me."

The Arrow Boys of Riimenze, Southern Sudan, are a village militia formed to protect civilians from the Lord's Resistance Army.

Catholics in Congress

Despite a huge turnover of Catholic Democrats voted out or retiring after the last election cycle, the decrease in the number of Catholics in the House of Representatives will not be as great as expected because of the election of 33 new Catholic Republicans to the 112th Congress. With one House race still contested, the number of Catholics in Congress will be 149 or 150, compared with 162 in the 111th Congress. Catholics will now make up about 28 percent of the members of Congress, down from 30 percent. Both figures are still higher than the percentage of Catholics in the U.S. population, which is 24 percent. For the first time in recent memory, the number of Catholic Republicans in the House, 61, nearly equals the number of Catholic Democrats, at 64 or 65. That marks a dramatic shift since the last Congress convened two years ago with a Catholic House contingent of 98 Democrats and 38 Republicans. Catholic membership in the Senate, at 15, has remained relatively stable.

Canadian Bishops' Criticism Rejected

Jason Kenney, Canada's minister of citizenship, immigration and multiculturalism, fired back at Canada's bishops after they criticized his recently introduced bill against human smuggling. The views expressed by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' justice and peace commission in a letter on Nov. 25 reflect a "long tradition of ideological bureaucrats who work for the bishops' conference producing political letters signed by pastors who may not have specialized knowledge in certain areas of policy," Kenney said. He added that the bishops' intervention underscores the reason why "the church makes the detailed application of moral principles in public policy the prudential responsibility" of lay professionals. The bishops warned that the act might contravene international and Canadian law concerning the rights of refugees and reminded Kenney that national security interests should not trump human dignity.

After Visitation, Reconciliation

Rome must acknowledge the "depth of anger and hurt" provoked by the apostolic visitation of American nuns, the Vatican's number two official for religious life said in an interview on Dec. 6 with John Allen, a correspondent for The National Catholic Reporter. Archbishop Joseph Tobin, secretary of the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, called for a "strategy of reconciliation" with women religious. The archbishop said that he does not expect any "punitive" fallout from the visitation. He said that before any decisions are made resulting from it, women's communities should have a chance to know the results and to respond. Many women religious in the United States have objected to what some perceive as the secrecy of the process. Archbishop Tobin said that as a matter of "justice and charity," he will "strongly advocate" for feedback and a right of reply for women religious.

NEWS BRIEFS

Louis Sako

The Pax Christi International Peace Award for 2010 was given on Dec. 8 to **Louis Sako**, the Chaldean archbishop of Kirkuk, Iraq, a prominent defender of Iraq's endangered minorities. ✦ In November Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari told a visiting cardinal, **Jean-Louis Tauran**, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, that he could not abolish his nation's blasphemy laws, but would seek to revise them to better protect minority religious rights. ✦ The discovery of an earth-bound microorganism that thrives on arsenic will expand scientists' understanding of the definition of life, said the head of the **Vatican Observatory**, José Funes, S.J. ✦ Pope Benedict XVI would welcome an **electric popemobile** as a sign of his commitment to environmental stewardship, Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo, president of the commission governing Vatican City State, said on Dec. 1. ✦ Three dozen top **Israeli rabbis** threw their support on Dec. 7 behind a religious ruling barring Jews from selling or renting homes to non-Jews. ✦ Two **Congolese soldiers** have been arrested for the murder of a 42-year-old priest, Christian Bakulene, who was killed on Nov. 8 in North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. ✦ After a two-year investigation by Bishop David L. Ricken of Green Bay, Wis., the church has approved for the first time **a Marian apparition** in the United States, experienced by Adele Brise in Champion, Wis., in 1859.

KYLE T. KRAMER

Future Shock

Growing up, I had many evangelical friends who were preoccupied with an imminent Second Coming of Christ. I could never get on board with this apocalyptic worldview—I think I worried too much about experiencing a frightening moment, when I realized that the truly faithful had been raptured away and I had been left behind. This Advent, however, I find myself thinking again about the future in eschatological terms.

The next few decades will likely be the advent of what author Richard Heinberg describes in his book *Peak Everything*. In a nutshell, this means that the increasing rate of average global energy and resource production will level off and begin to decline—perhaps slowly, perhaps precipitously. In either case, an expanding population will face a scarcity of cheap energy and natural resources, as well as a likely reduction of agricultural productivity and less available fresh water, amid other challenges.

Beyond simple denial out of despondence or willful ignorance, there are two basic approaches toward a future of such limits. The first is fearful pessimism, a dystopian outlook that envisions resource and energy availability taking a steep nosedive. This could lead to what I call the "Republican nightmare": the rise of centralized, authoritarian, Big-Brother regimes (or corporations), which enforce draconian measures on the citizenry and engage in wars over scarce resources. Or we could experience the "Democratic nightmare": a catastrophic failure of the economy, mass food and water shortages and the disintegration of government and society. What survives of civilization will do so in "lifeboats": small pockets of survivalists in a degraded, lawless world akin to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. On either count: yikes.

A more optimistic stance toward a future of limits recognizes that for all our shortsightedness and sin, human beings are astoundingly adaptable. We have survived almost everywhere on earth. We find our way through disasters, as the Benedictines did after the collapse of the Roman Empire, when they helped rebuild Europe's agricultural base and sustained its intellectual heritage through the dark ages.

Adaptability could take the form of a smooth, green-tech transition without serious economic, political or climate disruption. Scientific ingenuity somehow devises alternate means to provide a first-world lifestyle and sufficient energy, raw materials, water, food and fiber for nine billion people. Or, with bumps along the way, perhaps adaptability could mean a less-is-more future. The "less" of that future would probably lead to an overall reduction of global economic output and energy use, fewer material goods, less easy mobility and a smaller, less centralized population. On the positive side, this future would likely entail resilient economies based on information, services and agriculture rather than manufacturing. It could result in more meaningful work, stronger community connections, more equitable standards of living among nations and (one hopes) greater aesthetic and spiritual sensitivity.

What are Christians to make of these scenarios, if we take God's future seriously and pray, "Thy kingdom come"? How can the hopeful seasons of Advent and Christmas help us be like the five wise, waiting virgins, who were prepared for the bridegroom's arrival?

> Cataclysm, the prophets insist, is not God's dream for creation.

The birth of Jesus revealed that God's love is no mere philosophical principle; it is fully incarnated in the nitty-gritty of creation and history. Belief in a love-infused world provides no talisman against disaster—but it can drive out existential fear that disaster will have the final word. It can also inspire our own incarnation: trading the anesthesia of virtual reality and consumerism for the genuine satisfactions and sorrows of responsible relationships to each other and to the creation. Incarnated life is real life.

Incarnated life is also a life of limits. In the incarnation, the infinite God took on the confines of flesh and history in the form of a servant and showed us that love is most powerfully present in willing self-limitation.

God's love will certainly be active even amid cataclysm. But cataclysm, the prophets insist, is not God's dream for creation. Advent limns a kinder, gentler future: of cooperation and clever adaptability but also of simplicity and enoughness rather than extravagance. To embrace limits, as did the child in the manger, is to embrace life itself—

KYLE T. KRAMER *is the author of* A Time to Plant: Life Lessons in Work, Prayer, and Dirt *(Sorin Books, 2010).*

PHOTO: REUTERS/TIM WIMBORNE

A businessman wakes up in Sydney, Australia, after participating in a C.E.O. Sleepout event in June sponsored by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Over 600 business leaders spent a night outdoors on pieces of cardboard at events around Australia that raised over $1.74 million to support the society's services for the homeless.

St. Vincent de Paul's lifetime of service among the poor

Inventive Love

BY ROBERT P. MALONEY

When Vincent de Paul died 350 years ago last September, all of Paris mourned. Poor and rich alike wept because they loved this man whose life (1581-1660) had been extraordinary. As a teenager he fled the poverty of his peasant village, was ordained illegally at 19 and began to build a secure future as a priest eager to take on lucrative jobs. Gradually, however, he underwent an extraordinary conversion and decided to devote his life to God in the service of the poor.

"Love is inventive, even to infinity," Vincent told his followers. He also showed them what such inventiveness meant. Few saints have been as active. If one highlights only his principal accomplishments, the list is still impressive.

Struck by the need to organize practical works of charity in Châtillon, France, Vincent, then 36, founded "the Charities." The work spread rapidly. Under different names in different places but linked worldwide as the International Association of Charities, the association today engages more than 260,000 members in 53 countries. (Frederic Ozanam and six companions adopted a similar structure centuries later to found in 1833 the Society of St. Vincent de Paul; it now has 750,000 members in 145 countries.)

Vincent also established the Congregation of the Mission, which by the time of his death had spread to Poland, Italy, Algeria, Madagascar, Ireland, Scotland, the Hebrides and the Orkney Islands. He served as superior general of the congrega-

ROBERT P. MALONEY, C.M., *the former superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, lives in Philadelphia. He serves as administrator for Dream, a joint project of the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Daughters of Charity for combating AIDS in Africa, and is also the chairperson of the Vincentian Family Board for Zafen, a microfinance project in Haiti.*

tion until his death, writing its rules, conducting general assemblies and resolving foundational questions. The priests at the motherhouse conducted more than 1,000 parish missions.

Increasingly involved in the reform of the clergy, Vincent met with clergy leaders every Tuesday for ongoing formation. More than 12,000 young men made retreats in preparation for the priesthood. During the last 25 years of his life, Vincent established 20 seminaries.

In midlife, Vincent, age 52, joined with Louise de Marillac, a 42-year-old widow with an intense attraction to the religious life, to co-found the Daughters of Charity. With Louise at his side, he served as superior general, drafting a rule and working out the revolutionary juridical formula that would make this community of women a powerful apostolic force. The Daughters of Charity were among the first sisters to work outside the cloister, serving the poor in their homes, in hospitals and in schools—a model followed by hundreds of thousands of sisters in succeeding centuries.

As the daughters took to the streets of Paris, Vincent faced opposition. "Did not the Lord agree that women should enter his company?" Vincent would ask. "Did the Lord not lead them to perfection and to the service of the poor? If, therefore, the Lord did it—he who did everything for our instruction—should we not do the same thing?" Rapidly, more than 60 houses of the daughters sprang up in France and Poland. And in the years after Vincent's death, the Daughters of Charity became one of the church's largest congregations.

Vincent also promoted the care of foundlings. He assigned many members of the Daughters of Charity to the work and built 13 houses to receive the children. In 1647, when funds fell short, Vincent issued a simple, eloquent appeal to the Ladies of Charity, a group of wealthy women he had assembled: "Ladies, if you continue to support these little ones, they will live. If you abandon them, they will die. Pronounce sentence. Their life and death are in your hands. What is your verdict?" They elected to support the children.

When the Thirty Years' War began to wind down, Vincent organized relief. He sent Brother Matthew Regnard (nicknamed Reynard, or fox) across battle lines in Lorraine 53 times, disguised and carrying a fortune for the relief of the people.

For nearly a decade, Vincent also served on the Council of Conscience, an elite administrative body that advised the queen on the selection of bishops. Eventually, Cardinal Jules Mazarin, whose criteria for choosing bishops were more political than Vincent's, maneuvered to have him removed. Yet Vincent remained a counselor to the great spiritual leaders of the day.

In 1652 poverty enveloped Paris, and Vincent, then 72 years old, initiated massive relief programs. At the motherhouse, the priests and brothers provided soup twice a day for thousands of poor people, and the houses of the Daughters of Charity fed countless others. "Let us love God," he encouraged them, "but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows." He organized collections and each week distributed some 6,000 pounds of meat and 3,000 eggs, as well as winter and summer clothing.

These examples are merely the highlights of his life of service. So striking were his activities that the homilist at his funeral said of Vincent, "He just about transformed the face of the church."

In recent years, artists have created new images of Vincent as Father of the Poor. Particularly striking is the centerpiece of a triptych painted by Kurt Welther for the Chapel of Mercy at St. Vincent's Parish in Graz, Austria. Vincent sits among the poor as one of them. He wears no halo. It is as if everyone had just come

TRUTH-TELLING

• Vincent urged his followers to let the truth have a special place in their lives. He encouraged them to: speak the truth, despite embarrassment or inconvenience; witness to the truth, so that their lives match their words; search for the truth humbly as wayfarers rather than thinking that they possess it as an owner; practice the truth through works of justice, charity and peace; strive for single-minded truth, or purity of intention; and live truthfully as servants of the poor, keeping their possessions modest and sharing readily.

• There is a great attractiveness about those who speak the truth. They are truly free. People relate to them easily because they sense that they are transparent and have no hidden agendas. Vincent acknowledged that speaking the truth consistently is a difficult discipline. Truth, in this sense, is fidelity. Jesus is true to us and promises to be with us always, even to the end.

BEYOND CHARITY

Vincent often spoke of a love that is both "affective and effective." He sought to provide ongoing educational and health care programs and to establish structures that would help the poor emerge from poverty. In that light, to celebrate the 350th anniversary of Vincent's death, the international leaders of the Vincentian family have chosen to focus on the poor in Haiti and have inaugurated a microfinance Web site, www.zafen.org, which invites all interested parties to offer micro-loans and donations to previously screened projects there. The goal is not almsgiving, but work toward systemic change—helping Haitians create sustainable businesses that will enable them to emerge from poverty.

in as Vincent sat down to eat a simple meal, and he shares it with them. The faces of the poor at the table are indistinct. But the viewer, Vincent told his followers, "will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, whose will it was to be poor, is represented to us by these men and women." The face of Christ shines from the center of the table, reflecting the Lord's presence. This meal recalls Christ surrounded by his disciples at the Last Supper, the sacramental meal of God's love for his people.

The Simple Way

During Vincent's lifetime, those close to him regarded him as a saint. What struck his contemporaries was the spirituality that lay beneath whatever he did. Vincent emphasized simplicity, proposing it to each of the groups he founded as the first virtue for them to nurture. "Simplicity is the virtue I love most," he said, "I call it my gospel." He told the Daughters of Charity, "Wherever you see Christian simplicity, walk with confidence."

"God is very simple," he said. Vincent saw simplicity as a mission-oriented virtue that would enable his followers to identify with the poor and communicate authentically with all. A fundamental way of being simple, he said, is to listen humbly to all. Our ears should be open to the words of those who teach officially in the church, like the pope and bishops, and also to the cries of the poor, our brothers and sisters. In fact the poor, who so often go unheard, should have a privileged voice in the church. Experiencing the turbulence of church politics in his day, Vincent said, "The poor have the true religion." For this man, who had once escaped poverty in search of a comfortable life, living simply moved to the top of his values. He believed that Christians must share God's gifts generously with the poor.

When Vincent died on Sept. 27, 1660, it was clear that a deep spirituality had transformed his humanity. By his own account, he was strong-willed and had been easily moved to anger as a young man. He also had a tendency to be moody. But he recognized these traits and the need to confront them. "I turned to God and begged him incessantly to change my dry, contentious manner and to give me a warm, gentle spirit. And by the grace of God, and with the little bit of attention that I gave to holding back the movements of nature, I have somewhat changed my dark moods." His contemporaries witnessed that the mature Vincent was not only inventive in deeds, but had become a warm, approachable man who related to rich and poor alike in a simple, loving way. A

ON THE WEB
A selection of **America** articles on the saints.
americamagazine.org/pages

Christmas in Paradise

A lesson in flowers

BY B. G. KELLEY

When I was small and Christmas trees tall, I used to work while others played.

My father was the "parish florist" in a tiny neighborhood in Philadelphia called Paradise. My father was devoted to his own holy trinity: the Catholic faith, the family and the community. He served his community with flowers for his entire life. Flowers, for my father, were a gift from God, as great as any other natural wonder—a full moon, the mountains, rainbows and sunsets. Flowers, he would remind me, are a steady force, softening even the toughest among us. Most of all, Pop taught me that flowers speak to the verities of heart and soul: love, honor, truth, prayer and sacrifice. His flowers taught me lessons that endure.

Many such lessons were learned at Christmastime, when the forest scent of Douglas fir wreaths, studded with pine cones and clusters of red holly berries, filled my world. When I was 13, my father asked me to help him make the wreaths. In Paradise, Christmas without one of Pop's wreaths on your front door was something like a church without a stained-glass window. "Watch," he said. "It's time you learned how to make the wreaths."

I stood next to his worn workbench, watching his hawser-like hands, textured from years of shearing, wiring and cleaning flowers, weave the branches of Douglas fir into a perfectly shaped wreath and then decorate it. He was patient, exacting and attentive to every detail as he crafted the wreaths with the precision of a diamond cutter.

At first I did not grasp that he was also teaching me the pillar of his work ethic: never sacrifice the right way of doing something for the sake of profit, even if it means blisters on your hands or no money in your pocket. "That's the way God would want you to live," he said. It stuck to me the way the first snowman you build sticks in your childhood memories.

Before long he placed a bundle of loose Douglas fir branches on an extra workbench, and I began to make the Christmas wreaths myself. My initial wreaths were more shapeless than shapely, and Pop let me know it. With his vigilant eye, he would slyly glance over and say, without turning his head, "Start over." He wasn't complaining, just explaining. I began anew.

I got better, and my father recognized it. He put the wreaths I had made in the shop for sale, which made me bounce with joy. Occasionally I would peek through the small window that opened to the front of the shop to check on whether any of my wreaths had sold. My eyes lit up when I saw Pop take one off the hook and hand it to Joe Sweeney, a steelworker.

"I'm a little short," I heard Joe tell my Dad.

"Joe, you pay me when you can."

When my Dad returned to the back of the shop, I said, "You just gave a wreath away for nothing, and it was one of mine." He looked me in the eyes and said, "You'll learn some day that it isn't the money that counts, but in God's eyes it's the people who count."

ART: DAN SALAMIDA

The Poinsettia

I worked side by side with Pop in the shop in Paradise for 30 Christmases, right up until he died. What I remember most is the universal Christmas flower, the poinsettia, known as "the flower of the holy night." The poinsettia is a language that helps us commu-

B. G. KELLEY, *a frequent contributor to* ***America,*** *is the author of* The World I Feel, *a book of poetry.*

nicate when words won't. Its power to lift a sagging spirit comes as no surprise if you know the legend of the flower. It tells of a poor Mexican girl who had no gift for the cathedral's altar on Christmas Eve. Out of desperation, she picked a bunch of unsightly weeds on her way to church. As she reluctantly presented her gift, a miracle occurred: The weeds were transformed into deep red poinsettias.

When I reflect on that legend, I always see the sorrowful face of an old woman staring at me from the dirty window of her front door after I had rung the bell to a creaking house. Pop had sent me out in his Ford panel to deliver her flowers.

"What do you want?" she shouted in a voice burdened with sadness.

"Flowers, ma'am," I replied.

She opened the door slowly. "Who sent them?" she asked. She was about 70 years old, bent over, with gray, stringy hair. She held a shillelagh in her hand as a cane.

"There's a card inside the envelope on the package," I said.

She asked me to put the poinsettia on the coffee table. When I did, she immediately opened the envelope and read the card. Almost instantly her face brightened. Then just as quickly she burst into tears. "It's from my daughter in California," she said. "I haven't heard from her in nine years. Bless you, son. Bless you." She limped over to a desk, opened the drawer, grabbed a $5 bill and handed it to me.

I handed it back. "Please," I said, "use it to call your daughter."

When I returned to the shop and told my father about the old woman, he smiled, reached for his wallet, took out a $5 bill and gave it to me.

Last Chores in Paradise

My last chore every Christmas season was to haul six heavy fern plants and two huge chrysanthemum bouquets in gold-colored vases—donations from my Pop—across the street to the parish church, Corpus Christi, and decorate the altar. Business in Paradise was always good to him, and he wanted to show his thanks in the place from which he thought his good fortune came.

When I returned to the shop after dressing up the altar, he handed me a Douglas fir wreath and said, "On your way home, put this on the rectory door."

Every Christmas morning as a boy, I would revel in my gifts under the tree—the clothes, the toys, the games, the Mickey Mantle bat, the Bob Cousy basketball—that is, until my dad would appear on the upstairs steps. He watched for several minutes; then, once he had gained my attention, he pointed to the church. I was not about to argue. Besides, he was right.

Christmas Mass was always memorable: the parish priests were dressed

in embroidered silk vestments; the church resounded with organ music and the alleluias of the choir; the fresh flower smell mingled with the pungent aroma of incense; the altar boys were dressed in red cassocks and slide-rule-straight white surplices. It was wonderfully pious.

I vividly remember walking to Mass the first Christmas that I began to make the Christmas wreaths. As I passed the rectory, I glanced up at the Douglas fir on the door and wondered if it was one I had made. *Nah. It was too perfect.*

Fifty Years From the Beginning

These days the little flower shop in Paradise is gone, as is Pop, now in a more important Paradise. Still, whenever I see a Douglas fir wreath, I see his reflection—his thick crop of black hair, his chiseled Irish face and dark-brown eyes that sparkled like polished pinewood. I see my reflection in them, too—the teenager standing at the side of his father's workbench.

I will always be blessed with a usable past, a wellspring of lessons from which to draw, as well as a strong faith, permanent, not only in the way my father lived his life through Christ, but also how he transferred to me the power in flowers—God's gifts. Flowers were able to fill whatever holes within me needed filling, to nourish my faith and celebrate God's goodness. This connection to flowers and my Catholic upbringing sustains, even saves, me.

The shop in Paradise gave me a sense of place and purpose, a sense of belonging, a sense of the Catholic teaching that exhorts me to continue to seek fulfillment in both a secular and spiritual life by being before becoming. Being has nothing to do with accomplishments, success or money; it has to do with the truths of the heart and soul: love, honor, truth, prayer and sacrifice—even now that I am tall and Christmas trees are small. A

ART | JAMES MARTIN

THE FIRST NOËL

A meditation on three dazzling mosaics

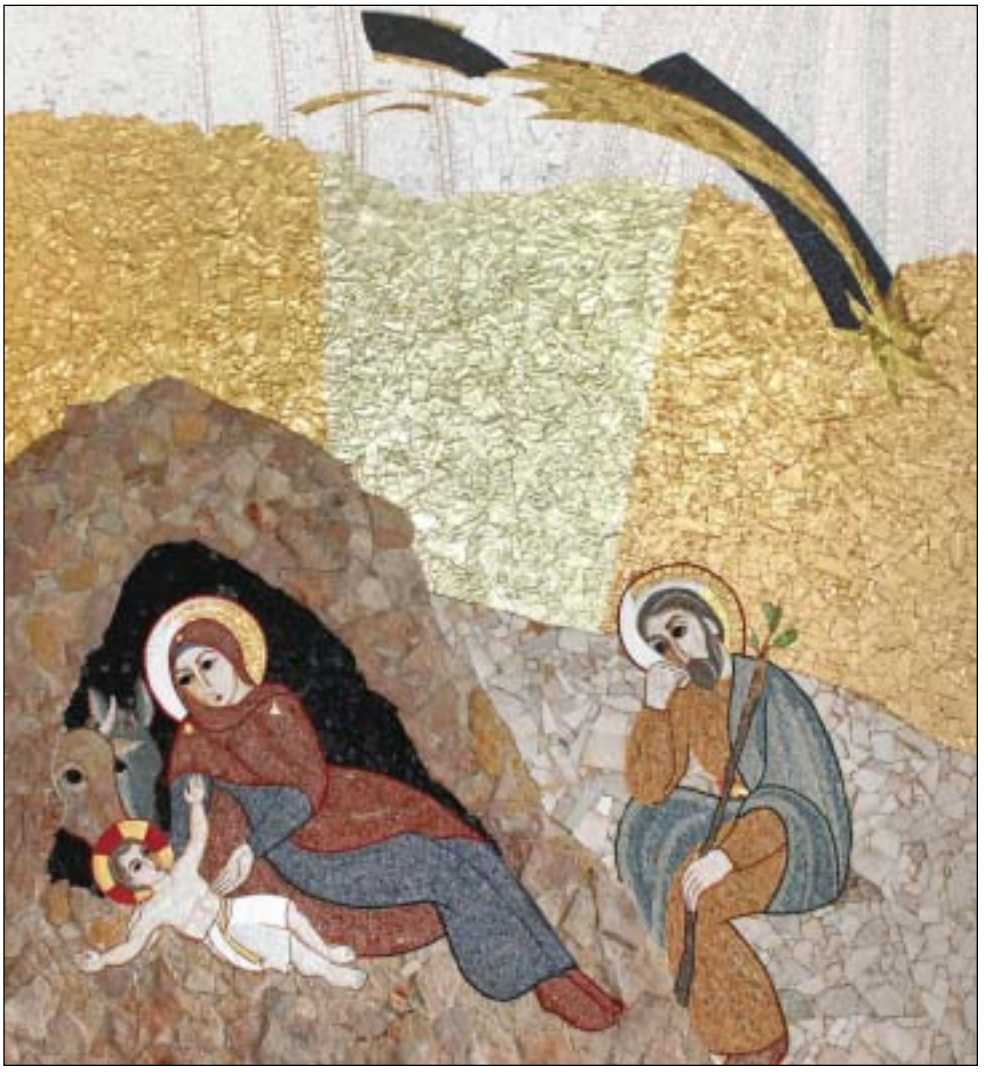
When the chapel for Sacred Heart University in Connecticut was dedicated in 2009, much of the public attention was focused on the massive mosaic newly installed behind the main altar, which depicts Jesus Christ at the center of salvation history. Anthony Cernera, then president of the university, had retained the services of Marko Rupnik, S.J., an artist whose distinctive craftsmanship appears in the Vatican's papal apartments and in the main basilica in Lourdes.

Overlooked at the time, however, was another, equally precious jewel: the Blessed Sacrament chapel. This intimate space, with just a few wooden benches, is now used for daily Masses and private meditation. What makes the space so astonishing is that its walls are covered from floor to ceiling with brilliantly colored mosaics of scenes from the Nativity story. It gives one the impression of having stepped into an icon. On these pages are reproductions of some of the mosaics with three brief meditations.

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., *is culture editor of* ***America****.*

The Nativity

The mosaic of the Nativity of Our Lord dominates the small chapel. Mary is robed in a deep red, a color that Eastern iconographers traditionally reserve for royalty. Here, at the beginning of her life with Jesus, she points viewers to her son, as she would do at the wedding feast of Cana, when she utters her last words quoted in the Gospels: "Do whatever he tells you." Mary looks uncomfortable as she lies on the cold, hard stones. In places, the chunky tesserae that Rupnik used to fashion the scene are as large as an adult hand; they could be actual stones. But Mary's ungainly posture presages her life, which, while filled with joy, would be painful at times. Joseph looks on pensively, as if exhausted from the journey to Bethlehem, and holds a flowering staff, the symbol of his chastity. The two seem to know that this respite is temporary. Their lives with Jesus, filled with joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties, have now begun.



PHOTOS: TRACY DEER-MIREK

The Wise Men

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that the "wise men" came from "the East" to worship the Messiah. Or as Christmas carolers sometimes sing, they came from "afar." In Rupnik's portrayal, though, the richly attired kings, sporting golden crowns to match their haloes, step on stones that are rather near. The artist incorporated into the mosaic pieces of a local Connecticut stone: shale. In the chapel, then, the connection between the exotic journey of the wise men and our own is made clear: our path to worship the Lord and to bring him our own good gifts can begin wherever we find ourselves.

Saints Joachim and Anne

This is perhaps the most unexpected part of the Blessed Sacrament chapel: a touching depiction of Joachim and Anne, the traditional names of Mary's parents. (The names appear in the apocryphal Gospel of James.) It is one of the tenderest portraits of a married couple I have ever seen.

How rare it is in a Christian setting to see a couple portrayed in such a clear demonstration of physical affection. Even when Mary and Joseph are depicted as a couple, they are seldom shown touching each other, lest the art challenge the viewer's image of the couple's chastity.

But Joachim and Anne led a full, married life and had at least one child, Mary. In Rupnik's mosaic, they rejoice in the birth of their new grandchild and embrace, their faces pressed together in utter joy.

When I saw this mosaic, I thought of the verse often used at weddings, something their grandson would later say, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark: "The two shall become one flesh." Perhaps Jesus knew his grandparents well and reflected on their love.

Joachim and Anne are one in love and devotion.

"The Holy Family," by Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1645).

PHOTO: ART RESOURCE/SCALA

Madonna

She's absorbed in the gift she holds,
this infant sign.

She wears the trace of a smile,
as innocence will do.

"Look at him," she is thinking.
It is a mother's "Ecce homo."

Does she dream of his future weight
when she upholds him?

The infant lingers in bliss,
with eyelids closed.

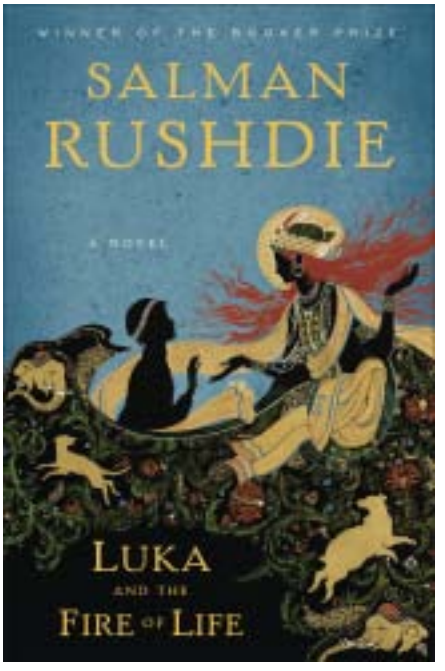
JAMES S. TORRENS

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

MODERN MYTHMAKING

LUKA AND THE FIRE OF LIFE
A Novel

By Salman Rushdie
Random House. 240p $25



Salman Rushdie has two sons, Zafar and Milan, born so far apart (1980, 1998) that each might as well be an only child. And to each of them he has dedicated a lyrical fantasy about a hapless story-telling father rescued by an omnicompetent young son. Rushdie reportedly wrote his first such tale, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), in response to Jafar's request for a novel that children like him could read. Nobody knows whether Milan made the same request; but in either case, Papa did not quite deliver.

Like the adventures of Haroun, those of 12-year-old Luka are so packed with allusions (to ancient mythology, world literature and pop culture), wild wordplay and serious ideas ("Time is not only Itself, but is an aspect of Movement and Space"), that they hardly qualify as tween-lit. The framework of the "novel" may be the timeless folkloric quest for survival-and-rescue, but the superstructure Rushdie has built on it is utterly adult (except for the near-absence of sex). As in *Haroun*—which he wrote just after being fatwa-ed for *The Satanic Verses*—Rushdie appears in the self-mocking guise of Rashid Khalifa, the unstoppably loquacious "Shah of Blah," painting himself out of the picture by his almost exclusive focus on the bold and precociously bright Luka, but then reinserting himself with the unmistakable authorial voice of S.R. The result may not qualify as a children's classic, but it is a fine performance.

The plot revolves around Luka's attempt to rescue Rashid from a vampiristic, ectoplasmic character called Nobodaddy (William Blake's ferocious caricature of God the Father), who is slowly draining his life away. To stop this monster—who superficially resembles his father—Luka has to steal and bring back the Promethean Fire of Life (yes, Prometheus is in the cast and plays a crucial role), which demands an all-but-impossible river journey on the Argo and, later, a magic carpet into the World of Magic, with a lively assortment of helpers and hinderers. Among the former are a dog named Bear, a bear named Dog, Soraya, the Insultana of Ott, the "Otter queen" (but a sassy girl, not a mustelid) and a coyote who talks like a cowpoke (the Trickster figure).

As for the villains—well, they're practically innumerable, a horrible mob of creatures like the Respecto-Rats, the seemingly all-powerful Lords of Time (Jo Hua, What Was; Jo Hai, What Is, and Jo Aiga, What Will Come), along with a vast horde of cranky, resentful, no-longer-believed-in gods from Sumeria to ancient Egypt to Japan to Scandinavia to Mexico. Rushdie maintains a demure silence on the living religions, but his contempt for superannuated deities is intense. It is a heady, fizzy Edward Learean-Joycean cocktail (best quaffed by adults); and if the outcome is never really in doubt, after a sluggish start the feats of derring-do pick up speed until the pace becomes delirious.

Rushdie's touch throughout is light and assured. He never transports us to the enchanted realm of the *Arabian Nights* or the Grimm brothers' fairy tales or Lewis Carroll or Kenneth Grahame—but then, how many writers do? The hallmark of the best magical storytelling seems to be the way it makes us accept the most astonishing and unlikely things as perfectly obvious, if not inevitable: Rumpelstiltskin? Quangle-Wangle Quee? The Jabberwock? Mr. Toad? But of course! These things just are. Coleridge once criticized himself for over-moralizing *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.* "It ought," he said, "to have had no more moral than the Arabian Nights' tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well and throwing the shells aside, and lo! The genie starts up and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant *because* one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son."

Rushdie's story likewise lets moralizing crowd out some of the magic. The loving son has to save his kind, learned but fallible father. The forces of evil, like Nobodaddy and his allies, have to be fought and overcome. Art has to vanquish stupidity and violence and bigotry and cruelty and hate. And naturally it all works out, as it "should." Still, Rushdie the showman puts on a very good show. If, despite his best intentions, he sometimes overstresses

ON THE WEB
Maurice Timothy Reidy reviews "Black Swan."
americamagazine.org/culture

the masculine side of life, we might recall that all of his four marriages have ended in divorce; so it is no surprise that he has no time for happy couples.

Father-and-son love is the game here, and it is played out in the imaginary world of literature, of every sort under the sun. The doting raconteur in the city of Kahani (Hindi for story), in the land of Alifbay (alphabet) is given new life by his splendid son, who is still young enough not to have any Oedipal issues with the old man or to view his fame with anything like irony. It is all warm, witty and wry—and a welcome relief from the fulminations of Grand Ayatollahs everywhere.

PETER HEINEGG *is a professor of English at Union College, Schenectady, N.Y.*

ANDREW J. GARAVEL

CONNECTIONS

HUMAN CHAIN
Poems

By Seamus Heaney
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 96p $24

An older man watches the television news: Aid workers in some distressed spot are passing bags of relief supplies one to another. Suddenly he is back on the farm of his childhood, one of a line of men and boys tossing sacks of meal "eye-to-eye, one-two, one-two," a human chain. As the title of this book suggests, continuity lies at the heart of Seamus Heaney's latest volume of poems—or rather continuities: connections between parents and children (especially fathers and sons), between the writer and his poetic precursors, between places and the people formed by them, between the observer and the natural or man-made world, between things and the names we give them, between past and present. In many ways, connections like these have always marked Heaney's verse, but here the insistence with which he makes them seems more intense, along with—perhaps because of—a heightened realization that the hard work of establishing such continuity does not get easier with age. Yet for all that, he demonstrates once again that "the whole thing's worth the effort."

The poet invites the reader to look with him at his home ground, the Ulster countryside:

As between clear blue and cloud,
Between haystack and sunset sky,
Between oak tree and slated roof,
I had my existence. I was there.
Me in place and the place in me.
Where can it be found again,
An elsewhere world, beyond
Maps and atlases,
Where all is woven into

And of itself, like a nest
Of crosshatched grass blades?

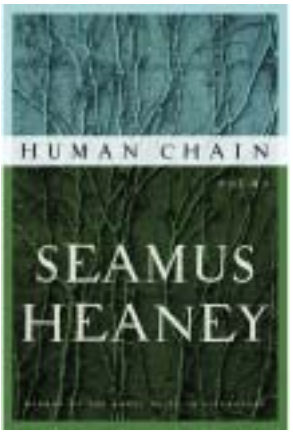
The "elsewhere world" of the poet's imagination has its consolations, but Heaney resolutely forbids himself (and us) to take them on the cheap. In summoning up these landscapes he avoids a purely nostalgic kind of pastoral. "A Herbal," modeled on a medieval Breton poem, celebrates the flowers and grasses while acknowledging the nettles: "Enemies—/ Part of a world/ Nobody seemed able to explain/ But that had to be put up with." That world and its troubles (in Northern Ireland, "the Troubles" as well) are present to one degree or another, even in the seemingly benign:

Yet for all their lush
Compliant dialect
No way have plants here
Arrived at a settlement...
Nor does the grass itself
Ever rest in peace.

"Settlement" and "plants"/"plantation" have inescapable charges of colonialism in Ulster, but here Heaney does not engage the overtly political as he sometimes has in the past. He continues to assert that the poet's job is to look steadily at the delight and horror of the world and to find ways to express both, what he has elsewhere called "that whole creative effort to bring the meaning of experience within the jurisdiction of form."

If you know a bit
About the universe
It's because you've taken it in
Like that,
Looked as hard
As you look into yourself....

His verse has always been personal; and, as his friend and colleague Helen Vendler has observed, each successive volume can in part be taken as another chapter of autobiography. Heaney suffered a stroke in 2006, from which he has recovered. In one poem he describes the high-speed ambulance ride (his "once capable/ Warm hand" now "flop-heavy"). Another retells the story of the healing of the paralytic in chapter two of Mark's Gospel (though our attention is directed neither to Jesus nor to "the one who takes up his bed and walks" but to the sweating,



straining men who bear him up to the roof and lower him down). The poet now employs a vocabulary of loss and diminishment:

As I age and blank on names,
As my uncertainty on stairs
Is more and more the lightheaded-
ness
Of a cabin boy's first time on the
rigging,
As the memorable bottoms out
Into the irretrievable....

One of the poems is Heaney's translation of an 11th- or 12th-century Irish verse, the song of an exile who "will look back but not see/ Ever again/ The men of Ireland or her women." A line from this poem appears in another, in which he looks through an old family photo album, confirming that his theme is the country from which we are all exiles—not Ireland, but the past.

The snapshots of his parents remind him that over the years, like Aeneas in the underworld, he tried to embrace his father three times. It is only at the end of the old man's life that he can "properly" be embraced, by a grandson rushing into his arms, "proving him thus vulnerable to delight." Now a grandfather in his own turn, Heaney allows himself to be vulnerable to the delights of the senses, whether recalled in berries ("Never, in later days/ Would fruit/ So taste of earth./ There was slate/ In the blackberries,/ A slatey sap") or in shoveled coal ("The sound it made/ More to me/ Than any allegory./ *Slack schlock./ Scuttle scuffle./ Shak-shak*"). As always, it is the felicitous words and their surprises that engage Heaney and his readers: how, for example, a "windfall" here is not an apple blown to the ground but a kite, string snapped, taking off into the sky. The pleasure he takes in words themselves is as fresh as ever, even when they mark the onset of age—for example, the "inkhorn" of the

old Irish scribes and the "inkwell" used by young Seamus are now equally "robbed of sense."

The first poem of *Human Chain*, "Had I Not Been Awake," recalls a sudden violent storm many years ago; he tells how it

> *...got me up, the whole of me a-patter,*
> *Alive and ticking like an electric fence;*
> *Had I not been awake I would have missed it,*
> *It came and went so unexpectedly....*

It is our good fortune that Seamus Heaney has been and continues to be awake and alive to the world, showing us in the ordinary "the marvelous as he had known it."

ANDREW J. GARAVEL, S.J., *is assistant professor of English at Santa Clara University, California.*

LETTERS

The Loneliness of All Saints

Robert Ellsberg's "Dorothy in Love" (11/15) reminded me of a day in high school in the 1950s when a teacher talked about Dorothy Day in the Newman Club. We visited her New York office. I have been an admirer of this remarkable laywoman ever since.

These letters reveal a woman who is spiritually strong. She does not demand that Forster Batterham live the Catholic social message. Her long loneliness is similar to what many saints feel at times; and like those saints, she does not lose faith in God. They do not surrender but hold to their inner faith, to the hand of God. Eventually she had to know that if she was to do what she was called to do, there could be no Forster in her life.

ANTOINETTE CARBONE
Riverhead, N.Y.

Did Galileo Go to Mass?

There is a fundamental error of fact in the penultimate paragraph of John Haught's review of my book *Galileo: Watcher of the Stars* (12/6). Haught says I make "so little of the fact" that Galileo attended Father Benedetto Castelli's daily Mass. In fact, during Galileo's years under house arrest near Florence, Castelli was in Rome, so Galileo certainly did not attend the Mass he said daily. Professor Haught seems not to have noticed that I provide evidence that Castelli was shocked to discover that Galileo had become, as he thought, a Christian; and of course I discuss Galileo's own Copernicanism and Maria Celeste's piety—as Professor Haught, who has read my book, must know.

DAVID WOOTTON
York, U.K..

Leaders With Backbone

Re Christopher Ruddy's "Our Ecumenical Future" (11/8): It seems that the Vatican's position on ecumenism is another example of an exaggerated fear of losing power and authority rather than of seeking and embracing Christ's message and truth. Many Catholics have left the church over the past 40 years. Many have found Jesus alive and well in other Christian churches. Instead of writing articles, why not do something more effective?

To propose a march on Rome might be considered "heretical," but it might bring legitimate change. Did not Jesus demonstrate his profound displeasure over the mismanagement of his father's house? Today we have a church characterized by dissent, division, criticism and intransigence. If theologians and church leaders are waiting on the sidelines for a new pope who will align the church's mission more closely with Christ's message, it will be another 50 to 100 years for that kind of change. Jesus was not just a polite soul filled with compassion and love; he knew how to funnel his energies in protest against religious authorities. Some call this backbone. We see it in Martin Luther and Martin Luther King Jr. We need leadership with backbone.

MICHAEL J. BARBERI
Carlsbad, Calif.

Not Where History Is Going

The vision of Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., in his commentary "Two Peoples, One State" (10/15), may seem superficially attractive, but it is completely opposed to the wills of both peoples, existing realities and basic political rights.

Israeli Jews and many Israeli Arabs are committed to the vision of their state as the Jewish homeland and refuge. And Palestinian Arabs are not excited by the prospect of Israeli Jews "demonstrating leadership" in a hypothetical combined state. A "one-state" solution would require Israel to annex the West Bank and confer Israeli citizenship on its Arab residents against their will—a blatant violation of international law that also defies common sense. Palestinians and Israelis have different histories, religions, languages and all other characteristics of peoplehood, going back thousands of years.

The trend in recent decades has been toward more nationalism, not less. The former Soviet Union is now 15 independent states. Yugoslavia disintegrated amid war and chaos into seven countries. Iraq, Lebanon and other multi-ethnic states—including Belgium, which Father Schroth presents as a model of a binational state—are straining at the seams, or worse.

NEVET BASKER
Bellevue, Wash.

Not Even Nixon

M. Cathleen Kaveny's "Catholics As Citizens" (11/1) makes good reading, but I'm puzzling over the contrast between prophet and pilgrim. I think of myself as a bit of each and truly believe that the prophet is "acutely aware of just how far human society still remains from the kingdom of God" and attempts to speak and act prophetically out of that realization. My more significant reaction to the essay, read 48 hours after watching the election returns, is that the (false) prophets who have advocated voting based on the candidates' and parties' stances on abortion have contributed mightily to a polarized electorate and to the ascendancy for the moment of the party of no.

Bishops who have all but demanded that their people vote Republican in the past few election cycles now witness a Republican party that not only Teddy Roosevelt but even Eisenhower and Nixon would not recognize. And they wonder why they cannot get bipartisan support for just and humane immigration reform to be brought to Congress.

FRANK BERGEN
Tucson, Ariz.

The Church Discriminates?

I applaud your editorial "Bullying, a Deadly Sin" (11/8), but I don't see how this is consistent with the official teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality. When a whole class of people, even prior to behavior, is classified as intrinsically disordered, one can reasonably conclude they can be treated as lesser persons and deprived of certain rights, like raising children or receiving kinds of employment, especially in the Catholic Church. Despite the church's statement that "every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided," I cannot help but see that the official teaching is a form of class "bullying" that discriminates against a broad swath of the human race. Discrimination is discrimination, overshadowing the parsing of "just" and "unjust" treatment.

KEN SMITS, O.F.M.CAP.
Fond du Lac, Wis.

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.

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Fleeing for Life

HOLY FAMILY (A), DEC. 26, 2010

Readings: Sir 3:2-14; Ps 128:1-5; Col 3:12-21; Mt 2:13-15, 19-23

"Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt" (Mt 2:13)

Four years ago, Fermina López, a native of Guatemala, found herself divorced, homeless and jobless, with three children to raise. She felt she had no choice but to flee her beloved homeland and make the perilous journey north in search of work. She was one of the lucky ones who survived the five-day trek across the desert and found employment in Phoenix. When she was able to save enough money for smuggler fees, she sent for her children one by one, whom she had left in the care of her neighbors. The first two made it, but her youngest, who got as far as the U.S.–Mexican border in July, is now feared dead. The Lopez family is one small unit among the 214 million international migrants in the world today, a number that has doubled in the last three decades. Not all have achieved their dreams for a life no longer threatened by death from political opponents or military regimes or inadequate economic resources.

Today's Gospel tells of Joseph's dream, in which a divine messenger relays Herod's intent to kill the infant Jesus. The angel instructs Joseph to flee with Mary and the child to Egypt, a traditional place of refuge for Israelites (e.g. Gn 42–48; 1 Kgs 11:40; Jer 26:21). They too faced a treacherous desert crossing, though the Gospel tells none of those details. We can only imagine Mary and Joseph's fear as they stole away under the cover of darkness and all the hardships they endured. Matthew says nothing about what happened when they arrived in a strange place, having to navigate an unfamiliar language and culture. Who helped them along the way? How did Joseph find work? What did Mary think about Joseph's dreams?

The evangelist skips ahead to the holy family's departure from Egypt, quoting Hos 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called my son." As he is wont to do, Matthew interprets all that happens in the life of Jesus as fulfillment of Scripture. By identifying Jesus with Moses and the Exodus, he introduces the theme that Jesus is the new authoritative teacher of the law.

Just as Moses received a divine command to return home after the death of those who sought his life (Ex 4:19), so Joseph follows the angel's command to return home after the death of Herod the Great. Herod's sons, however, still pose a threat. Archelaus, the eldest, inherited Judea, Samaria and Idumea, which he ruled for 10 years (4 B.C.–A.D. 6). Philip governed the area north and east of the sea of Galilee, and Herod Antipas controlled Galilee and Perea. Archelaus was no less cruel than his father, so Joseph is fearful of returning to Judea. Once again he is directed by an angel in a dream, and he settles his family in the more peaceful Galilee. It may have been the availability of work in Sepphoris, the city being built by Herod Antipas as his capital, that led Joseph to settle his family in Nazareth, some four miles away.

As usual, Matthew interprets this move as fulfillment of Scripture. Matthew's meaning is puzzling, however, since there is no text in the Scriptures that says, "He shall be called a Nazorean." It is likely that he intends an allusion to Is 11:1, which speaks of a shoot (*netzer*) that will sprout from the stump of Jesse, thus highlighting Jesus' royal Davidic lineage.

The experience of the holy family of having to flee for their lives into a foreign land can give strength and courage to millions of today's migrants. Those living in the host country are challenged by the Gospel to consider what kind of welcome they would want to offer to newcomers if they were none other than Jesus' own family.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Pray for justice and compassion toward immigrants.
- Listen for God's directives for how to preserve the life of the most vulnerable.
- For what do you dream? Talk with God about it.

ART: TAD DUNNE

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

All Are Welcome

EPIPHANY (A), JAN. 2, 2011

Readings: Is 60:1-6; Ps 72:1-13; Eph 3:2-6; Mt 2:1-12

"They all gather and come to you" (Is 60:4)

Some years ago at a gathering of sisters who were discussing the decline in vocations, Jamie T. Phelps, O.P., posed this question to the predominantly white group: What if I told you that there were 200 healthy, energetic, faith-filled young women who were ready to join you tomorrow? Of course heads nodded and smiles revealed the warm welcome they would be accorded. Sister Jamie queried further: What if I told you the 200 women were black? The sisters suddenly found themselves struggling with their response as they faced their own unconscious racism.

The sisters' experience may not have been far removed from that of the Matthean community, which was predominantly Jewish, struggling to welcome Gentile believers. This is the Gospel in which Jesus emphatically warns his disciples, when he sends them out on mission, not to go anywhere near Gentiles or Samaritans but only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6).

This is also the community that told the story of the Canaanite woman whom Jesus rebuffed when she pleaded with him to heal her daughter. He declared that he had been sent only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). Her faithful persistence helped him to see that his mission could embrace others beyond the borders of his own people. This openness to other people than Jews reaches a climax at the conclusion of the Gospel, where the final words of the risen Christ are his instruction to go and make disciples of all nations (28:19).

This all-inclusive mission of Christ is already foreshadowed in the opening chapters of the Gospel, where exotic visitors from the East are the first to do homage to Jesus. The term *magi* originally referred to a caste of Persian priests. They were not kings themselves but served their king with skills like interpreting dreams. In the Gospel they also appear to be adept at interpreting the movement of the stars. Following the star, they are the first Gentiles to seek and recognize Jesus, offering their precious gifts to him. In so doing, they foreshadow the way Gentiles will flock to the Christian communities, bearing gifts for mission.

All the readings for today's feast underscore the welcome extended to all in God's embrace. Isaiah speaks of how people from every nation will stream toward the renewed Jerusalem, all bearing their gifts and proclaiming God's praises. The responsorial psalm likewise sings of how every nation on earth will adore God's anointed one. The letter to the Ephesians emphasizes that the Gentiles are "coheirs, members of the same body and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (3:6). There are no second-class members and no privileges for those who had priority in the faith. All are equal co-members.

The very insistence on the equal status of Gentiles, backed up with the assertion that this has now been revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit, reveals the struggles of the early Christian communities to make this a reality. The difficulties in welcoming Gentiles have long ago been overcome, but others still face us today. What welcome is given to people of different races? Of different socioeconomic strata? To women? To those whose marital status is irregular? To those of a different sexual orientation? Facing our prejudices and working to dismantle them is a most difficult task. It can take a lifetime, but it is possible to do with the help of the Spirit, who continues to reveal the copartnership of all in the body of Christ.

BARBARA E. REID

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Pray for the grace to welcome people unlike yourself into your faith community.
- Ask for the Spirit's help to accept the gifts of "outsiders" who come with authentic faith.
- Ask Jesus for the healing of any prejudices you recognize within yourself or your community.

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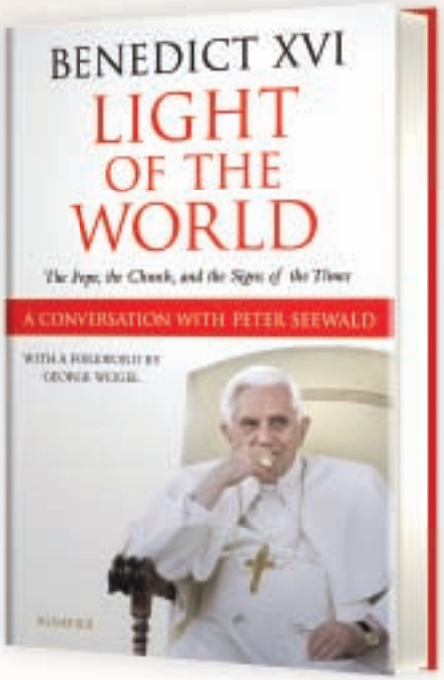
Was there a "cover up"?

Have you considered resigning?

Can there be a genuine dialogue with Islam?

Should the Church rethink her teaching on priestly celibacy, women priests, contraception, and same-sex relationships?

What about Holy Communion for divorced-and-remarried Catholics?



Is there a schism in the Catholic Church?

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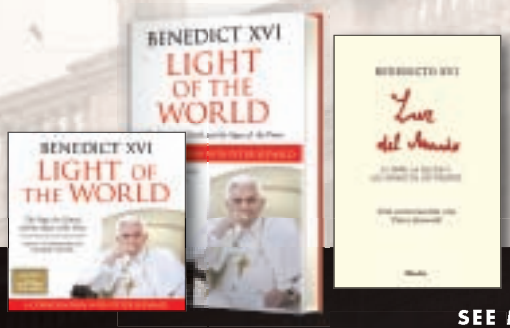

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