

America



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It Starts in Mexico Rethinking Immigration Reform *Tim Padgett*

The Common Good and the Election
Alexia Kelley and John Gehring

**A De Sales Oblate
at a Jesuit University**
Thomas B. Curran

OCTOBER CAN BE the cruelest month, breeding misery in the hearts of countless baseball fans while rewarding only one team with a World Series title. I remember a day in one of these Octobers 19 years ago as if it were yesterday: Oct. 15, 1988, the day I and millions of others were reminded of the sudden intrusion of the seemingly miraculous into everyday life.

The Oakland A's, starring steroid-powered stars Mark McGwire and Jose Canseco, had marched easily into the World Series that year, winning 104 games in the regular season, then crushing the Boston Red Sox in the playoffs. Their World Series opponent was the Los Angeles Dodgers, an improbable bunch of injury-riddled veterans whose season had featured no great consistency but an improbable ability to win the big game.

The team was the pride of Los Angeles in those days (speak to me not of the pretenders to the throne from Orange County, who were and are and

always will be from Anaheim). But the Dodgers were more than that. My parents had left New York in the late 1960s to take their chances on the Left Coast, part of a still-ongoing national migration, and in the process left behind almost all of their relatives. Over the years we missed countless baptisms, graduations, weddings and funerals, knowing only secondhand the joys and sorrows our extended families experienced. The Dodgers owned the same story, favorite sons who baffled the denizens of New York by leaving for the rootless West in 1958, finding new life in the dry, earthquake-ridden soil of a distant land. Brooklyn may have never forgiven them, but Los Angeles has always loved them. And they were Catholic for sure, in those days, just like us—the O'Malleys and Seidlers at the helm, Vin Scully (a Fordham man) at the microphone, Tommy Lasorda in the dugout. And like so many of their fellow migrants, the Dodgers over the years enjoyed a hard-earned success in their new home, winning championships and setting attendance records year after year.

In 1988, the Dodgers had placed all their hopes on a talented, mercurial free agent outfielder by the name of Kirk

Gibson. Behind Gibson and the bookish pitcher Orel Hershiser, who had a season for the ages, the Dodgers took their division and faced the talented New York Mets in the playoffs. Like another Mets team just a few weeks ago, the favorites from New York suffered an improbable series of setbacks, while Gibson and Hershiser provided one miraculous moment after another over seven games to propel Los Angeles to the World Series.

The first game turned out to be the crucial one. Down early, the Dodgers fought back and were down by just one run going into the bottom of the ninth inning. Gibson had injured both legs in the previous series and had been declared unfit to play. Nevertheless, with the Dodgers down to their last out, he limped slowly to the plate with a runner on, then ran the count to 3 and 2 against the A's ace reliever, Dennis Eckersley.

The dulcet tones of Vin Scully have affected my memory of the next pitch, though I did not hear them at the time

(I was in Seat 17, Row K), because his call became

so iconic in the years following. Gibson, visibly hobbled, mustered all the strength in his upper body and took a mighty swing at Eckersley's signature backdoor slider, lifting it high into the right field seats for a two-run homer and the victory.

After narrating the ball's flight, Scully stayed silent for an exultant minute or two, surrounded by the deafening cheers of a joyful city, before adding the perfect coda: "In a year that has been so improbable, the impossible has happened!"

My 14-year-old brain might as well have exploded, and I didn't return from that high for hours. Or was it months? Perhaps years. The A's collapsed in the aftermath, losing in five quick games, and the Dodgers were champions.

The Dodgers have not been back to the big dance since: 19 long seasons. This year they were once again a terrible disappointment, a young team that lost its nerve in the heat of September and missed the playoffs entirely. In their stead, somewhere in the next two weeks the favorite team of other 14-year-olds will be named champions. For me, though, it will forever be a "high fly ball to deep right field.... She is...gone!"

James T. Keane, S.J.

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Cover Mexico's President Felipe Calderón holds up the national flag as Mexicans celebrate their independence day (Mexico City, Sept. 15, 2007). Reuters/Henry Romero (Mexico)

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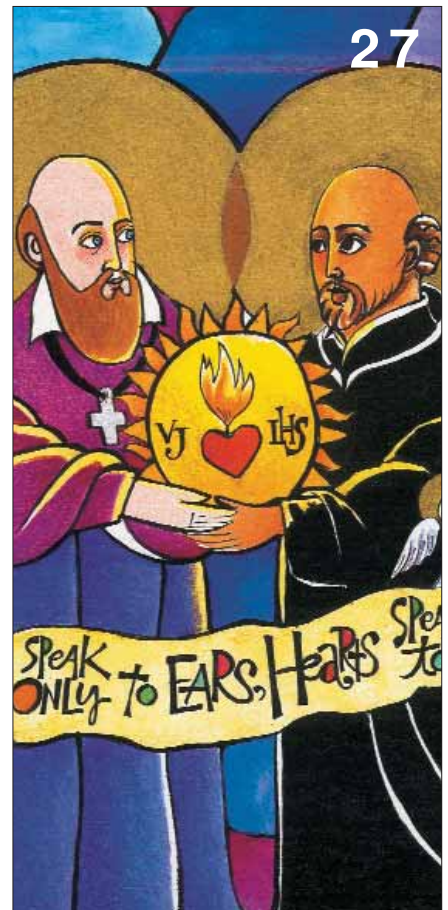
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A Church in Qatar

Despite the bleak news about the situation of Christians in much of the Middle East, there are occasional bright spots and reasons for hope. One glows in the southern part of Doha, the capital of Qatar, on a large parcel of land provided by the emir, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, to the Catholic community for the construction of a church. The emir is much admired by Bishop Giovanni Gremoli, O.F.M.Cap., who served as apostolic vicar of Arabia for nearly 30 years. The emir has fostered international inter-faith religious dialogue and in 2002 established diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

There are more than 100,000 Catholics resident in Qatar. Most of them are from from the Philippines and India; a smaller number come from Europe, Africa and the Americas. Taken together, they form a significant percentage of the country's population. As the largest Christian group, they received the largest grant of land for a church building. On it they are raising the country's first Catholic church, to be dedicated in February 2008 to Our Lady of the Rosary. The complex will also contain a conference center, residence, bookshop and café. To accommodate local sensitivities, it will not have a bell tower or a cross, and it will be open only to the members of the Catholic community. "Soon we will be able to celebrate Mass in a true church," said the pastor designate.

Love of Church and Nation

The fruits of the lengthy and careful dialogue between the Chinese government and the Vatican became slightly more visible on Sept. 21, when Joseph Li Shan was ordained bishop at the Immaculate Conception cathedral in Beijing. The tightly controlled ceremony was witnessed by a thousand people. There were security guards, photos were prohibited and the foreign press was excluded. But the presider was Bishop John Fang Xingyao of Linyi, who was among the first of the Chinese bishops to seek approval of the Holy See for his own appointment. Only after the ordination did the official Chinese press and *l'Osservatore Romano* make mention of it.

In his letter to Chinese Catholics earlier this year, Pope Benedict XVI called upon bishops in communion with Rome to make their ties known and to provide clear signs of their union with the successor of Peter. That is precisely what Bishop Li Shan did. At his ordination, while he was giving thanks to his family, who provided him with a Catholic education, and to the religious who formed

him, he declared that his vocation is to love the church and his nation. And at his first public Mass as bishop in Beijing's Saint Saviour Church, he stated, "I wish to thank the pope," thus eliminating any ambiguities about his appointment. He called on the faithful to recognize the urgent need to live the mission of the Gospel with an awareness of their environment, since they live in a society that is seeking spiritual values. The unity shown in the ordination of Bishop Li Shan is another welcome step on the path to reconciliation and the normalization of relations with China. We would hope that formal talks between Rome and Beijing will soon follow.

Great Catholic Books

In a small room on New York's Upper East Side, amid gilt candelabras, a hanging tapestry, dark portraits and a paneled ceiling, a little crowd recently gathered with Don Brophy, an ostensibly retired, longtime editor at Paulist Press, to launch his latest labor, *100 Great Catholic Books: From the Early Centuries to the Present* (BlueBridge). As the publisher poured wine, Brophy explained the criteria for his choices: Catholic authorship, a span of centuries, a mix of genres, books still in print, one book per writer, accessible to readers today. He said he did not rank the entries or claim these as "the greatest" Catholic books. Then he began to read snatches from the book, commenting as he went.

The Rule of St. Benedict, he said, was perhaps the second "book of the church" after the Bible; Brother Lawrence did not even write his best seller himself, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, a selection of his sayings and writings gathered posthumously; *Kristin Lavransdatter*, the Norwegian saga by Sigrid Undset, may "win new readers" because of an award-winning new translation; and *She Who Is*, Elizabeth Johnson's theological work, ponders a seldom-asked question in Catholic tradition: What would God be like imaged as a woman?

Afterward, the group asked about Brophy's favorite—"It changes every day"—and which books might help a Jew better understand Catholicism—"Try the fiction."

Mostly, the event celebrated the sheer joy of reading great books—the considered, well-crafted thoughts of another. Here was a roomful of people whose lives are shaped by authors who have reached them across experience, geography, culture, language and time. Given our culture's infatuation with speed, which militates against reflection, could e-mail messages or blogs ever produce such an effect? Or will we celebrate books forever?

'Jaw, Jaw,' Not 'War, War'

THE VISIT OF MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD, the president of Iran, to the United Nations General Assembly in New York during the week of Sept. 23 presented a sad series of missed opportunities. The city's tabloids, with their vitriolic headlines, and pressure groups, with their hostile protests, expressed the animosity already stirred up against the Iranian by the Bush administration. The administration's efforts to isolate its adversaries, rather than engage them in diplomatic exchanges, only intensifies tensions between our nations. Personal invective is never a substitute for a candid exchange of views. The chance to challenge Mr. Ahmadinejad's provocative opinions was lost in a barrage of personal insults and demonstrations.

The invitation extended to Mr. Ahmadinejad to address the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, despite public protests, was in the best tradition of university life, where the opportunity to hear unpopular viewpoints and challenge them is protected by academic freedom. Unfortunately, the president of Columbia, Lee C. Bollinger, apparently stung by public criticism of the university's invitation, chose to open the proceedings by calling the Iranian president "a petty and cruel dictator," who would not "have the intellectual courage" to answer searching questions about his interpretation of the history of the Holocaust and Iran's right to develop nuclear power. The reaction to Mr. Bollinger's remarks was mixed, but even some of those who had protested the university's invitation to Mr. Ahmadinejad expressed disappointment at the Columbia president's violation of norms of hospitality and academic courtesy.

Some of the Iranian president's comments at Columbia, like his denial that there are homosexuals in Iran, lived up (or down) to expectations. Nonetheless, he pointed out the moral ambiguity of the U.S. position on nuclear arms, which threatens Iran with military action if it pursues a policy of nuclear development, while violating nonproliferation agreements by favoring India's efforts to enhance its nuclear arsenal. The United States has also failed to observe its commitment to reduce substantially its own nuclear stockpile, a ruined pillar of the nonproliferation regime. To other nations such a double standard in taking and granting privileged exceptions from nonproliferation mandates seems an exercise in arrogance. Selective enforcement of treaties naturally arouses resentment

among disfavored nations, and it undercuts U.S. moral standing in the world. It will take decades for the United States to win back the good opinion lost by the overbearing style of this administration and the injury it has done to international law and institutions.

In arguing that the Holocaust should not be used to justify the oppression of the Palestinian people, Mr. Ahmadinejad likewise touched on an unresolved and neuralgic issue that haunts U.S. policy in the Middle East. Once again, he was able to parry accusations of denying history and meddling where he does not belong, because the U.S. administration, while giving lip service to the ideal of a two-state solution, has repeatedly employed a double standard. It has favored only those concessions to the Palestinians that have Israel's prior approval and appears to be shaping multiparty talks scheduled for November to fit Israel's negotiating strategy.

The meeting of the Iranian president later in the week with an interfaith panel of Christian leaders, arranged by the Mennonite Central Committee, was free of the personal rancor that soured his appearance at Columbia. The meeting, held in the Church Center for the United Nations, aspired, in the words of one participant, to explore the "common moral heritage" shared by Christians and Muslims. The Iranian president was asked whether it would be possible to identify and admit the shortcomings "of your society and of ours." While Mr. Ahmadinejad's answer was no more satisfying than his answers at Columbia, the attempt to engage in honest dialogue was more promising than the walkout executed by the U.S. delegation when the Iranian president rose to speak to the General Assembly.

AFTER MR. AHMADINEJAD DEPARTED, The New Yorker published a report by Seymour Hersh ("Shifting Targets," 10/8) of continued planning within the Bush administration for military strikes against Iran. The story made apprehensive readers nostalgic for Winston Churchill, who once said, "To jaw, jaw is always better than to war, war." The wider international community shares U.S. concerns about Iran, but the United States, as if out of a pathological need for an enemy, persists in shunning, isolating and demonizing Iran. If multiparty talks can succeed with North Korea, another nuclearizing member of the "axis of evil," might not constructive engagement and negotiation succeed with Iran as well?

Archbishop O'Brien Installed in Baltimore



Archbishop Pietro Sambì, left, the apostolic nuncio to the United States, and Cardinal William H. Keeler, retired archbishop of Baltimore, lead Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, center, to the bishop's chair for his installation as the new archbishop of Baltimore at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore on Oct. 1, 2007.

A crowd of about 2,000 people filled the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore Oct. 1 to celebrate the installation of Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien as the 15th archbishop of Baltimore. In a ceremony rich with tradition, Archbishop O'Brien called it "an honor and a privilege" to serve as the spiritual leader of more than 500,000 Catholics in the archdiocese. "Whatever I am, and all that I have I give to you," he said in a homily that was interrupted several times by applause. "And until that day when he calls me to judgment, I will seek to serve

you with the wholehearted love of Jesus Christ."

Archbishop O'Brien succeeds Cardinal William H. Keeler, who retired after heading the archdiocese for 18 years. Eight cardinals and nearly 70 archbishops and bishops from across the country and around the world attended the ceremony. More than 400 priests and 62 deacons joined the bishops in an opening procession that lasted more than 30 minutes. His homily was filled with gratitude for the past and with promises for the present and future. "The God of Abraham,

Isaac, Jacob and Jesus sees his divine image in each of us, and that same God is offended when that image is defaced—defaced by degrading poverty, defaced by unjust discrimination, defaced by addiction and by the crime that feeds those addictions, and defaced by the horrific sexual abuse of the young. For the times when the church has failed to do its utmost to curb these evils, we ask God's forgiveness and yours.

"I pledge today that I shall make every effort to ensure that whatever sins of omission or commission have been committed in the past will have no place in the future. It was passion for justice that led priests of this archdiocese to take leadership roles in the defense of the civil rights of African-Americans in the early 1960s. It was that passion for justice that led Lawrence Cardinal Shehan to face down jeers and catcalls when he testified before the Baltimore City Council in 1966 on behalf of open-housing legislation. And it is precisely that same passion for justice that is at the root of the Catholic church's combined defense of the right to life, from conception until natural death.

"And I pledge more. No one has to have an abortion. To all those in crisis pregnancies, I pledge our support and our financial help. Come to the Catholic church—let us walk with you through your time of trouble, let us help you affirm life, let us help you find a new life with your child, but let us help you by placing that child in a loving home. But please, I beg you, let us help you affirm life. Abortion need not be an answer."

Episcopal Bishops Take Decision on Gays

In a decision with implications for Catholic-Anglican relations, the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church vowed not to authorize any public blessings of same-sex unions or to elect another openly gay bishop while consultations continue throughout the Anglican Communion on "the pastoral needs of gay and lesbian persons" and other matters. The pledge came in a document called *Response to Questions and Concerns Raised by Our Anglican Communion Partners*, approved Sept. 25 at the close of the six-day House of

Bishops' meeting in New Orleans. The Rev. James Massa, executive director of the U.S. Catholic bishops' Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, welcomed the Episcopal statement from both "a Catholic moral and an ecumenical standpoint" but said it remained unclear "how effective this new instruction will be. What happens when a local bishop authorizes the blessing of same-sex unions in his or her own diocese?" he asked. "Would the national Episcopal body impose sanctions on the local bishop?"

U.S. Religious Leaders Meet With Ahmadinejad

U.S. religious leaders are "deeply concerned about the prospect of war with Iran," said a professor from a Catholic college who was part of an interfaith delegation that met with Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Sept. 26 in New York. The meeting was organized by the Mennonite Central Committee.

But Joseph Fahey, professor of religious studies and peace studies at Manhattan College in Riverdale, said he left the meeting feeling hopeful because of

statements Mr. Ahmadinejad made about the “renunciation of war and the quest for peace.” “This meeting was an attempt to build bridges with Iran despite the generally hostile reception President Ahmadinejad received here in New York City,” Fahey said in a statement issued after the meeting. (Protests had greeted the Iranian president while he was in New York to address the U.N. Security Council Sept. 25.) “We strongly believe that only through formal and informal diplomacy and respect for international law can there be peace between Iran and the U.S.”

Drew Christiansen, S.J., editor in chief of **America** and one of the respondents to the president during the meeting, said: “It is incumbent on all men and women of goodwill to engage respectfully with their adversaries, and not to vilify, demean or stereotype them. It is wrong to refuse to engage in honest and patient dialogue with those with whom we disagree. Blackballing and cold shoulders should have no place in relationships between states and peoples.”

Catholic Hospitals Will Comply With Flawed Law

Connecticut’s four Catholic hospitals will provide emergency contraception to rape victims without requiring an ovulation test, in compliance with a new state law that takes effect Oct. 1. In a joint statement Sept. 27, the Catholic bishops and leaders of Catholic hospitals in the state said that although they continue to believe that the law is flawed and should be changed, they would revise current protocols at the hospitals that call for both a pregnancy test and an ovulation test before the “morning after” pill, marketed as Plan B, is administered.

“To administer Plan B pills in Catholic hospitals to victims of rape, a pregnancy test to determine that the woman has not conceived is sufficient,” the statement said. “The administration of Plan B pills in this instance cannot be judged to be the commission of an abortion because of such doubt about how Plan B pills and similar drugs work and because of the current impossibility of knowing from the ovulation test whether a new life is present.” Plan B,

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.

containing a high dose of birth control pills, usually prevents pregnancy if taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex.

Vatican Message for End of Ramadan

In a message to the Muslim world, a leading Vatican official denounced terrorism and all violence committed in the name of religion. The message also took aim at religious discrimination, saying the rights of all believers must be protected during the “troubled times we are passing through.” The text, released by the Vatican Sept. 28, marked the end of Ramadan, the Islamic month of prayer and fasting that concludes in mid-October. It was written by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, who took over as head of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue earlier this year. Christians and Muslims, the cardinal said, need to intensify their dialogue so that younger generations “do not become cultural or religious blocs opposed to each other.” Cardinal Tauran began and ended his message by expressing the church’s “warmest greetings” to the Islamic world. But the text touched on a number of sensitive issues, especially those of religious liberty, violence and terrorism.

Jesuit Refugee Service Priest Killed in Sri Lanka

The Rev. Nicholaspillai Pakia Ranjit, 40, was killed in a blast from a claymore mine while he was driving food and supplies to displaced people near Kilinochchi, in an area under the control of Tamil rebels. Father Pakia Ranjit coordinated the work of Jesuit Refugee Service in Sri Lanka’s Mannar District, where control is divided between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam. The priest died Sept. 26; his funeral was scheduled for Sept. 29. One of the priest’s assistants also was injured in the blast. “We call upon the international community and all men and women of good will to condemn this killing and effectively voice their strong condemnation of the ongoing senseless war,” Bishop Rayappu Joseph of Mannar said in a press release.

The bishop praised Father Pakia Ranjit’s deep commitment to the poor and marginalized. “It is a heinous crime to attack and kill such peace-loving and unarmed heroes of our society,” the bishop said. “Enough blood has flowed on this little island nation. This blood cries for peace and not for vengeance.”



The faithful attend the Divine Liturgy at the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Philadelphia Sept. 30 marking the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the first Byzantine Catholic bishop in America. The service coincided with the worldwide Ukrainian Catholic Synod of Bishops, which was meeting near Philadelphia.



The Plight of G.M.

‘Rather than make better cars, Detroit chose to make bigger cars.’

THE LAST TIME the United Auto Workers union walked off en masse from General Motors plants, some 400,000 workers stayed off the job for 10 weeks in an attempt to win a week’s vacation between Christmas and New Year’s Day. The year was 1970, when cars of foreign origin were considered either an exotic luxury or a cheap imitation of the real thing.

It was the golden age of the great American gas-guzzler, when consumers were paying about 30 cents for a gallon of gas, and only Jack Benny complained about the price of filling up. In Benny’s case, of course, it was just an act—hilarious because it was so patently absurd. Gasoline was cheap and plentiful, and there was no reason to think it would ever be anything else.

The U.A.W. recently struck G.M. again—sort of. The strike lasted only a day or so, but it wasn’t the strike so much as the figures attached to it that caught the eye. This time there were only 73,000 workers left to walk the picket lines. It was a reminder of how the great American job has disappeared, replaced by...what? The very day of the strike, The New York Times reported that outsourcing companies in India are beginning to, yes, outsource their work, because Indians are getting too used to decent pay. And—wouldn’t you know—some of those outsourced jobs are returning to the United States. But they are not returning with decent wages and benefits. Those days, as the G.M. workers know well, seem to be gone forever, at least for blue-collar America.

Consider what prompted the U.A.W. strike: the union was demanding not a

year-end vacation—how quaint the very idea seems now—but protection from further layoffs and cuts to benefit packages.

The plight of G.M. and the American auto industry is not a study in how the mighty have fallen. It is a study in how the mighty took a flying, headlong leap from the heights of power and affluence. And as a result of this corporate freefall, thousands of American jobs have disappeared, and more will follow regardless of the union’s action.

G.M. says it needs more flexibility to compete with the likes of Toyota and Honda. But that battle ended two decades ago, and G.M. lost. It lost not because of the union’s inflexibility—after more than a quarter-century of labor peace, one can hardly point fingers at a supposedly recalcitrant union—but because of the collective greed and cynicism of the industry itself.

Simply put: At a time when the nation’s dependence on oil is threatening its national security and Japanese car companies are taking the lead in developing vehicles that run on alternative fuels, the great American contribution to automaking over the last decade has been the gas-guzzling sport utility vehicle.

Thanks a lot, folks.

When the rise and fall of the American auto industry is written years from now, the United Auto Workers union no doubt will be portrayed as an innocent victim of corporate cynicism, shortsightedness and outright stupidity. Rather than innovate, the industry used its muscle to persuade Washington to exempt light trucks, that is, S.U.V.s, from fuel-efficiency standards. Even worse, the sticker price of S.U.V.s is in essence subsidized, thanks to friendly tax loopholes.

That was Detroit’s response to the innovation, creativity and marketing ability of Toyota, Honda and other global car-makers. Rather than make better cars,

Detroit chose to make bigger cars, imperiling not only its market share but nothing less than America’s national security. The result? An industry that is absolutely, positively addicted to a product that is the bane of the highway and a boon to those who wish us harm.

The U.A.W. has been caught in this economic buzzsaw. It could hardly be accused of standing in the way of innovation, because there has been precious little in the way of new thinking from management. Even the most vocal critic of unions could not say, in fairness, that the U.A.W. has refused to work with management in an effort to help reverse Detroit’s decline. The union is far from flawless, but it is to be admired for the ways in which it chose cooperation over confrontation over the last two decades. It has worked with the companies to reduce work forces and help pay for skyrocketing health care costs.

Surely it did not have to be this way. At some point 20 years ago or so, America’s car companies could have attempted a more creative response to consumer demand for good, dependable sedans. Instead, the Japanese companies, especially Toyota and Honda, became richer and more powerful thanks to their fleets of midsize and compact cars: the Camry and the Accord, the Corolla and the Civic. Those models proved astoundingly popular, but by the time G.M. responded with its Saturn models, the game was over. And so G.M. has given us the Hummer, a vehicle designed for a rapid deployment force, while other U.S. companies—aided and abetted by the friends they have purchased in Congress—mock the very idea of energy independence and national security with their own gas-guzzling nightmares.

And who is paying the price for these awful strategies? The workers, of course. And as long as G.M. and the other U.S. car companies continue to self-destruct, the future looks bleak for the folks who work the assembly lines.

Terry Golway

From America’s archives:
the editors on the 1970
auto workers’ strike,
at www.americamagazine.org.

TERRY GOLWAY is the curator of the John Kean Center for American History at Kean University in Union, N.J.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/JAMES STEIDL



Highway sign near U.S. Mexico border in Arizona.

Rethinking immigration reform

It Starts in Mexico

– BY TIM PADGETT –

AT FIRST I THOUGHT it was just the tequila talking. While on assignment in Mexico City this past summer, I met some colleagues at a cantina to have a few drinks and solve the hemisphere's problems. The conversation inevitably turned to U.S. immigration reform, which had just collapsed in Washington. Mexico's President Felipe Calderón was cranking up the nationalistic protests against U.S. plans to build a 700-mile-long border fence costing as much as \$7 billion. Mexican journalists usually echo their government's anti-gringo indignation on such issues. But not tonight. "Go back and tell Bush to build the fence," one told me. Others at the table heartily agreed. I did a double take, wondering if Lou Dobbs had just sat down with us. But they were serious.

TIM PADGETT is the Miami and Latin America bureau chief for Time magazine.

Their turnabout reflects a change that has taken place in Mexican attitudes ever since a more genuine democracy emerged there seven years ago. In the minds of many, building the fence—and, theoretically, allowing far fewer migrants to cross illegally into the United States—would finally force Mexico's leaders to confront the inexcusable inequality that pushes almost a million Mexicans over the border each year. For decades, the jobs in America's vegetable fields, restaurant kitchens and hotel laundries have been an all too convenient social safety valve, taking the pressure off the Mexican elite. That overprivileged class has produced the world's richest man, telecom billionaire Carlos Slim Helú; but it seems oblivious to the fact that almost half of Mexico's 106 million people live in poverty—a quarter of them in extreme poverty, surviving on about \$1 a day.

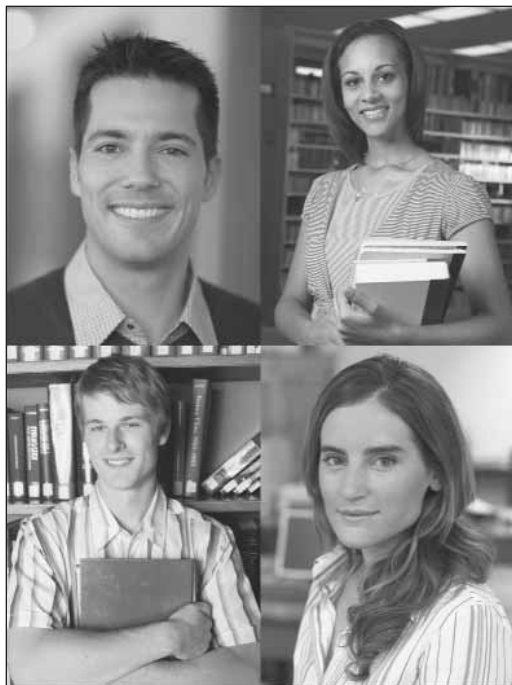
My Mexican colleagues were simply acknowledging what most Americans still fail to grasp: immigration reform is not domestic policy; it's foreign policy. Approaching it as the former has led us to one failed immigration scheme after another. I started my career in the 1980s covering the Reagan administration's sweeping amnesty for undocumented immigrants and its crackdown on employers who hired them. That was followed in the 1990s by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, intended to "seal" the frontier with fences and thousands of new border patrol agents. Result: by 2000, the number of

migrants entering the U.S. illegally had actually risen to a record of almost two million a year.

By then the message should have been clear: instead of trying to curb illegal immigration at the border, we should try reducing it at its source inside Mexico and Latin America, the region with the world's widest income disparities. As long as so many millions south of our porous border live in grinding poverty (and as long as the world north of the border remains addicted to cheap fruit-picking, dish-washing and room-cleaning), illegal immigrants will keep coming. But if we could work with countries like Mexico to steer more of their wealth and ours to the impoverished by means of better jobs, education and entrepreneurial opportunities—if we were to steer billions to those efforts instead of fences—we might not need the fences.

Increasing Capital and Credit in Mexico

Mexico is a conservative nation. But last year a leftist, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, came within less than one percentage point of defeating Calderón in the presidential election (and would have won had he not been such a strident and messianic campaigner). The main reason for his appeal is that his platform included commonsense economic reforms that Lou Dobbs and other immigration grouches should have applauded. Among them was a big increase in the amount of capital and credit for small farmers and



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small-business owners, who are the forgotten sector of Mexico's economy even though they employ almost two-thirds of Mexico's workers. "For once," López told me during his campaign, "we're going to confront the great sin of the Mexican economic system—that it doesn't create jobs."

Or at least jobs decent enough to "keep our young people," as López often shouted on the stump, "from having to abandon their towns and families for the other side of the border!" Calderón, a conservative who was favored by Mexico's notorious business monopolies, found himself having to co-opt much of López's rhetoric in order to win, insisting, for example, that "one kilometer of new road in Oaxaca," one of Mexico's poorest states, "is worth more than 100 miles of fence on the border." Now it is up to Calderón, and us—whether we like it or not—to prove that notion right.

There is increasing consensus among Mexico's poor, as well as its policymakers, that one of the best means of doing that is microcredit. The idea of bringing small business loans to a nation's most remote and economically depressed regions got a boost last year when the Bangladeshi microcredit guru, Muhammad Yunus, won the Nobel Peace Prize. Few countries need microcredit more than Mexico, where for tens of millions of citizens access to the wealth-generating benefits of a banking system is as rare as potable water.

In the developed world, for example, there are usually

fewer than 2,000 people per bank branch. In Mexican states like Oaxaca the number is 38,000, according to the Mexico City-based Association of Mexican Social Sector Credit Unions (Amuccs). What's more, Mexico's banks all but shut out small enterprises with exorbitant interest rates and maddening red tape. "That's one of Mexico's ugly paradoxes," says Isabel Cruz, director of Amuccs. "It actually has one of the hemisphere's largest financial systems, but it loans very little to its own economy." Only three banks, in fact, handle 70 percent of Mexico's financial activity, and little if any of it is conducted in the rural areas that produce the lion's share of illegal immigrants.

Creating Jobs and Improving Schools

Many of those immigrants have now decided to do what Mexico's banks won't. Mexicans in the United States send home as much as \$25 billion in remittances each year; and while much of it used to be wasted on flashy pickup trucks, wide-screen televisions and (apologies to my fellow Catholics) ostentatious churches, more is now being used to start local microcredit banks. The hope, of course, is that fostering new, job-creating businesses at home will eventually keep Mexican workers at home.

That ideal is being borne out in a small but growing number of rural Mexican towns, especially in the country's backward south (where López, not surprisingly, won almost

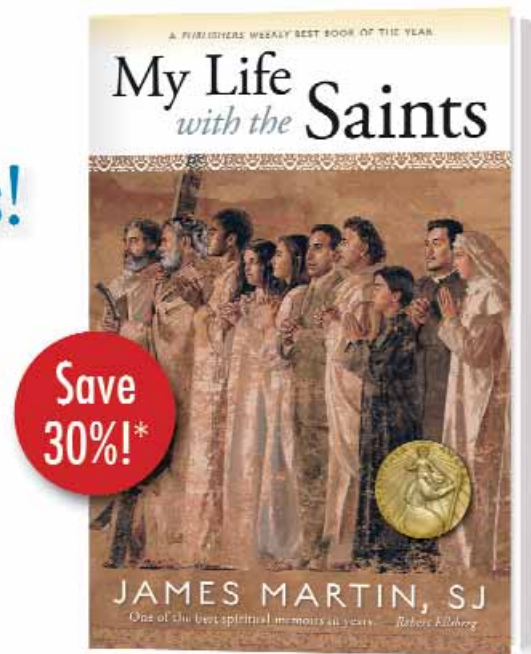
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Most Americans still fail to grasp that immigration reform is not domestic policy; it is foreign policy.

every state last year). Earlier this year I visited one of them, Santa Cruz Mixtepec, an indigenous Mixtec community in the rugged mountains of southern Oaxaca. Two-thirds of Santa Cruz's 3,000 residents live undocumented *al otro lado*, "on the other side" in the United States; and each year they send back almost \$1 million. A few years ago the wives in Santa Cruz took a chunk of that money and founded a microcredit bank, Xu Nuu Ndavi (Mixtec for "Poor People's Money"). With starter loans of \$5,000 and up, Xu Nuu Ndavi has helped build businesses as diverse as furniture-making and tomato greenhouses—a sorely needed shot in the arm for a town that still farms with oxen and wooden plows.

Slowly but surely, Xu Nuu Ndavi is yielding the most important result: Santa Cruz's workers are starting to return to *este lado*, or "this side," and some who considered leaving have decided to stay. One is 30-year-old Alberto Bautista, who recently came home from Arizona to work at his

uncle's new carpentry shop and start a family. Another is Roberto Hernández, who was poised to jump the border until he got a loan to start a metal window-frames business that he says should soon employ 10 people. "Opportunities like this are like infecting a child with a cold virus," Hernández told me with a laugh while adjusting his blowtorch. "It spreads."

Modesto Ramos, who has returned from Virginia, where he did construction work, caught the bug in a big way. Near his home now stands a complex of tomato greenhouses, each covering some 1,500 square feet, which from a distance look like large crystal bubbles amid Santa Cruz's small cinder-block homes. Stroking his Fu Manchu-like moustache, Ramos proudly strolled up and down the rows of plants, whose saladette tomatoes are in huge demand in this part of Mexico, and inspected the new indoor irrigation equipment he recently installed. "I listened to President Calderón talk about development on the radio a couple nights ago," he said. "But you can't talk about development until you start investing money in communities like this, with decent interest rates and more flexible terms," like those that Xu Nuu Ndavi offers.

Olivia Mendoza, one of the microbank's founders, said 95 percent of the loans so far have been paid on time—a sign, she added, that locals want to make this program work "in order to bring our families back together." She also knows that microcredit is not a cure-all for the migration plague. Rural schooling in Mexico, for example, has yet to enter the 20th century, let alone the 21st. "We need much more investment in education out here," Mendoza noted, "if we're going to make our kids employable in jobs with living wages." Another useful effort would be what's known as "legalizing" the poor: giving marginalized citizens like the Mixtecs formal legal title to their homes, businesses and other assets (which in Mexico's informal economy are estimated to be worth some \$315 billion) so they can parlay them into collateral for bank credit and investment capital.

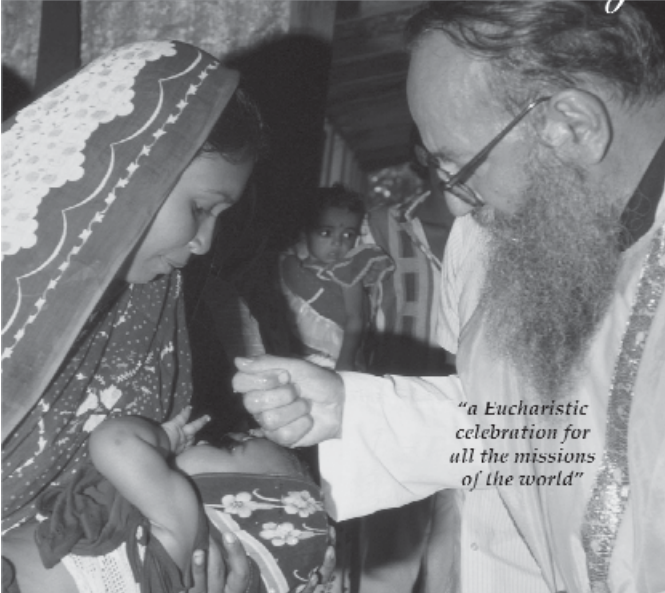
Revising Trade Agreements

The bigger point is that all these illegal-immigration remedies are what the United States can, and should, make a foreign-policy priority if we want to break our chronic cycle of immigration-reform debacles. Since the end of the cold war, America has too often tried to substitute free trade for for-

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eign policy, especially in Latin America, a region Washington usually dismisses as geopolitical trailer trash. Free trade per se is hardly a bad thing. Since the North American Free Trade Agreement took effect in 1994, Mexican exports to the United States have leapt from \$40 billion to about \$200 billion. But at the same time, the share of national income for Mexico's richest 10 percent has grown significantly, while that of the poorest 10 percent has declined. And that of the rural poor has plummeted: fewer than 3 percent of Mexican farmers today can compete with cheaper, and heavily subsidized, agricultural imports from the United States.

Nafta has obviously failed as a solution to illegal immigration, partly because the wealth it has created simply does not flow through Mexico's economic bloodstream, and partly because it has put Mexico's *campesinos*, or farmers, at an insurmountable disadvantage. One way we can help correct that is to revise Nafta to reduce agricultural tariffs at a less severe pace, while at the same time reconsidering our lavish subsidies to U.S. farmers.

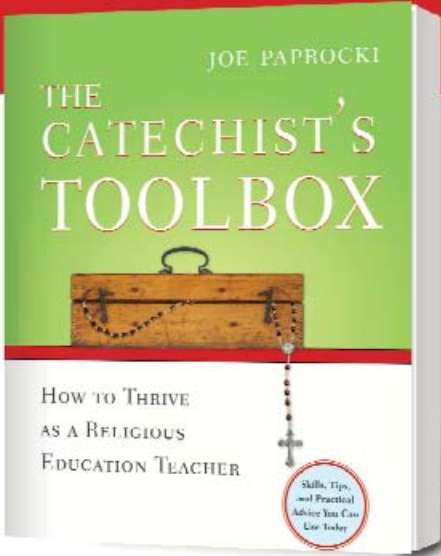
Another is to get into the microcredit act. A \$7 billion border fence might make America's xenophobes feel better in the short run. In the long run, however, they would be doing themselves a bigger favor by lobbying their congressmen to channel that money as foreign aid to microbanks like Xu Nuu Ndavi—and to pressure the Mexican govern-

ment to pony up, too. The World Bank last year announced a \$1 billion fund for small-business loans in Latin America, and the United States should follow suit (with much more cash than the paltry figures the Bush administration has discussed thus far). Promoting more business enterprises means more Mexicans participating in Nafta and, logic dictates, fewer Mexicans crossing the Rio Grande.

This brings us to the most urgent reform Washington needs to push in Mexico: dismantling the power of its ravenous monopolies and oligopolies, which control every industry from television to cement to sliced bread. They are the main reason that credit and capital get choked off from Mexican society, but Mexico can get away with it by simply exporting its desperate workers to the United States.

Rogelio Ramírez de la O, one of Mexico's most respected business consultants, joined the López campaign because he is convinced his country cannot continue this way. He is no fan of the Lou Dobbs lobby, but he grins when he hears the U.S. Congress threaten to tax the lucrative migrant remittances that Mexico relies on to prop up its lopsided economy. "The Calderón cabinet," he says, "is very nervous about that one." Taxing that money, unfortunately, would almost certainly put undue hardship on Mexico's poor. But like the fence, it is a tempting idea if it could jolt Mexico into meaningful reform. And you do not need a few tequilas to feel that way. **A**

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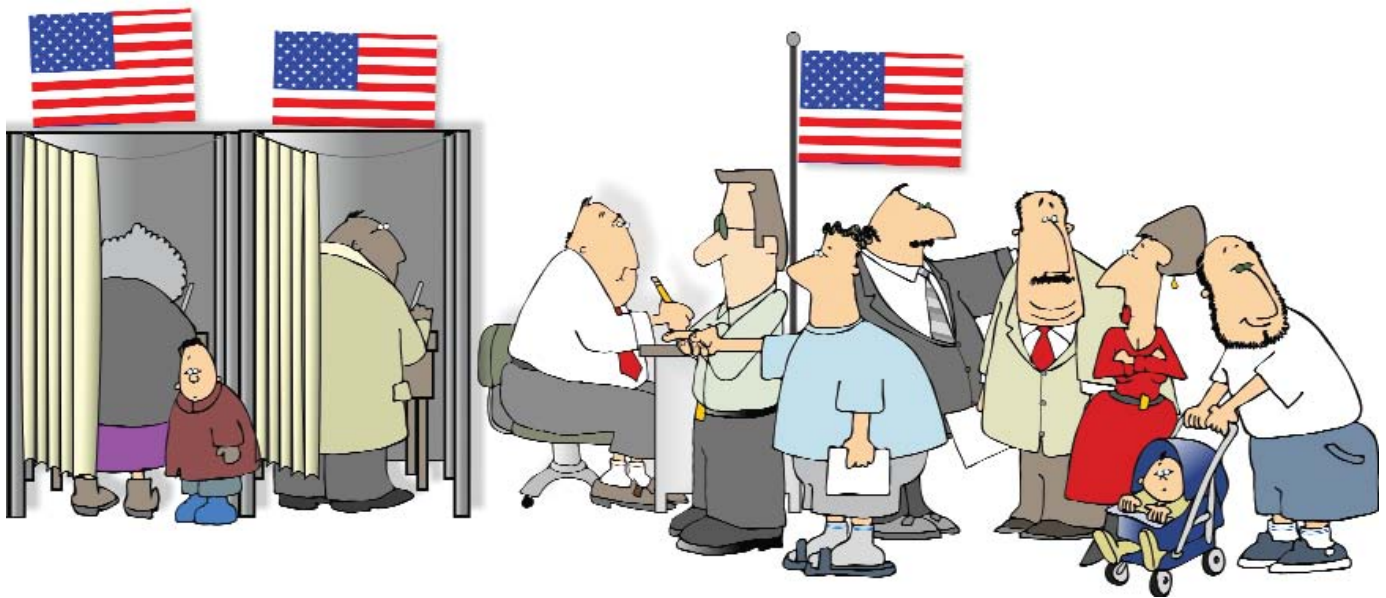
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A Catholic Call To the Common Good

BY ALEXIA KELLEY AND JOHN GEHRING



VICTOR HUGO, THE 19TH-CENTURY French writer, famously remarked that nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come. The common good—a classic theme of moral and political philosophy with deep roots in Catholic social teaching—is an old idea that has found new life in contemporary political discourse.

Rick Santorum, for example, a former Republican senator from Pennsylvania and a Catholic, has written a book titled *It Takes a Family: Conservatism and the Common Good*. His one-time opponent, Robert Casey Jr., a Catholic and currently a Democratic senator from Pennsylvania, made the common good a defining theme in his campaign. Several 2008 presidential candidates, including Senators Hillary Clinton and Sam Brownback, have peppered their stump speeches, talking points and position papers with language about the common good.

ALEXIA KELLEY is executive director and JOHN GEHRING is a senior writer for Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good.

Appeals to the common good resonate particularly at a time when war, corporate scandals, the government's bungled response to Hurricane Katrina and anxiety about globalization have left many feeling adrift in a rapidly changing world. "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold," W. B. Yeats wrote in his 1920 poem "The Second Coming." This could describe our own fractured and alienated era.

Despite the flurry of references to the common good in public discourse, however, the term often twists in the rhetorical wind and comes across as a vague idea, so unthreatening that it is about as controversial as clean drinking water. The common good has been invoked in sound bites and catchphrases to support both liberal and conservative arguments. But an authentic understanding of the common good—one enriched by its particular connection to Catholic social thought—has practical implications for public policy and defies conventional ideological and political categories. Indeed, Catholicism's long history of defining the common good as rooted in the dignity

ART: SHUTTERSTOCK/DENNIS COX

of the human person and the specific demands of justice, makes Catholics especially well-suited to challenge societal leaders to embrace a more energetic public agenda rooted in the common good.

Theory and Practice

For centuries, the Catholic tradition has emphasized a call to the common good as the centerpiece of Catholic social teaching. Building on concepts articulated first by Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas spoke about the good sought by all as intertwined with the reality of God. In the 16th century, the earliest followers of St. Ignatius Loyola were among the first Westerners to travel beyond Europe, inspired in part by a global vision of the common good. Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), was the first to make formal use of the concept of the common good as the starting point for the church's social analysis.

According to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, "The principle of the common good, to which every aspect of social life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning, stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people." Yet there is a stunning failure to connect the clarity of these ideals and the realities of a world in which poverty, war and racism tear apart the human family. As globalization dissolves borders and shrinks our world, for example, the burdens and benefits of global capitalism undermine the common good by widening the chasm between rich and poor, hope and despair.

The chasm was evident in a recent New York Times story, "The Richest of the Rich, Proud of a New Gilded Age" (7/15), in which billionaire tycoons boasted about their personal accomplishments, bemoaned taxes on their fortunes and had little to say about why more than 37 million Americans live in poverty in the world's richest country. A few months earlier, the Nasdaq launched a private stock market for elite investors with assets of more than \$100 million. Meanwhile, in many towns and cities, the blue-collar jobs that once supported the middle class

have disappeared as corporations pursue cheap labor, minimal regulation and higher profits outside the United States. Traditional community bonds are fraying. A commitment to the "commons," public spaces that benefit all, has given way to private, gated communities where strangers of different classes or complexions can live apart, at a comfortable distance.

Our political culture both mirrors and shapes these trends. While government has often been an instrument of social good during epochal changes in American history, several decades of ideological assaults have branded "big government" as antithetical to freedom and individual responsibility. The marketplace, privatization and the



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primacy of choice have become a secular trinity. While Catholic social teaching values the importance of personal achievement, it also insists that government take on responsibilities that the market or individuals alone cannot or will not meet. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the common good as “the reason the political authority exists.” Furthermore, the church’s social doctrine insists that “ownership of goods be equally accessible to all” and that the “universal destination of goods” requires a moral economic system in which workers earn living wages and resources are distributed equitably. Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, writes that love of God and love of neighbor are insepa-

ble and that “justice is both the aim and intrinsic criterion of all politics.”

These are powerful words with practical implications for our most divisive contemporary debates about abortion, war, immigration, health care and climate change. These words challenge us to think deeply about what it means to be faithful citizens and to reflect on how our conscience and faith inform how we vote and live as both citizens and disciples.

The 2008 Election

As a presidential election year approaches, campaigners will again rank Catholics among the most coveted voters. Since

Catholic social teaching is broad and deep, Catholics should insist that our national debate on values reflect the fullness of this rich tradition. Building a culture of life requires economic and social policies that help women choose life. It requires ending an unjust war, ensuring that poor children have health care and taking seriously the threats of global climate change. A renewed common good narrative in our public square has the potential to inspire a civic and moral awakening, one that Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned when he spoke of the “beloved community,” a society where all of us, not just a few, have the opportunity to share in the abundance of creation.

No political party has a monopoly on moral values. Both Republicans and Democrats have an equal opportunity to succeed or fail in living up to the obligations of the common good. As Catholics, our faith inspires us to help reshape our culture and politics not simply as another interest group, but as members of a global church that seeks justice for the most vulnerable because it recognizes our common humanity as children of God. We should take up this struggle with hope, insisting that our public officials treat the common good not as another catch phrase in a campaign playbook, but as the foundation of moral leadership. In this way, we speak from the heart of our tradition with a message as old as the Beatitudes and as powerfully relevant for this election as it will still be a century from now. **A**

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The Kingdom of God in the Time of AIDS

An interview with Michael Czerny

BY JIM McDERMOTT

MICHAEL CZERNY, S.J., is the director of the African Jesuit AIDS Network, which attempts to foster and support Jesuit-sponsored AIDS ministries on the continent of Africa. The interviewer is **JIM McDERMOTT, S.J.**, an associate editor of *America*.

YOU HAVE ARGUED that we need to look beyond medicine in dealing with H.I.V. in Africa. Can you flesh out your position?

We learn as we go along that AIDS is very complex. H.I.V. is a virus that reduces and destroys the immune system. But it's also a cultural, familial, communal and spiritual reality. The fight against AIDS has to be carried for-

ward on all those fronts.

The people who specialize in medicine, especially the pharmaceutical companies and the big funders, don't see this breadth. They see the pills; they want to see them distributed, taken and effective. And they're quite right in their own terms. If you can distribute this medicine and get people to take it, it will help to prolong life, improve the quality of life and reduce the stigma. But it's very important to see the other side of the thing.

Could you give some examples of these other dimensions?

Insofar as nutrition is a serious problem throughout Africa,



THE FACE OF AIDS IN AFRICA
One of her children sits next to the ailing Lydia Kathebwe, 31, in the Zamba district of Malawi in this photo taken in late May. Women make up nearly 60 percent of all H.I.V./ AIDS cases in Africa.

CNS PHOTO BY MICHAEL SWAN, THE CATHOLIC REGISTER

it's a problem for H.I.V. and AIDS. You can't take the medication on an empty stomach, and if you're undernourished or malnourished you are also much more likely to become infected and to succumb to other infections.

With AIDS, when somebody starts to get sick, they are shut away by the family in a back room. Often the husband will lock up the wife. Or if the 14- or 16-year-old daughter comes home and turns out to be H.I.V. positive, the father will throw her out. Now, if the effect of becoming H.I.V. positive is that you are thrown out of your family, excluded from your community, you lose your job and are no longer welcome at church, then you're going to die.

If you're brought in, you're going to live. If an H.I.V. positive mother can actually earn her living and take care of her child, she's much more likely to stay alive than if she is treated like a pariah and cannot make ends meet anymore and can't send her children to school.

We in the church, who are so close to people, are in a very good position to deal with these things, by inclusion, by support groups, by home visits, by preaching and spiritual accompaniment, and just by including AIDS in a nonjudgmental way in the life of our community.

Very, very few of the funders see this. They see with a kind of a numerical logic: they see the CD4 count (high or low), the number of medications they can distribute, the number of people who come. Those actions are all valid, but they aren't the whole story.

What challenges would you put to the West?

My articulation of Africa's position is, Give us justice, and we'll take care of AIDS ourselves. Keep your medicines. Keep your handouts. AIDS is part and parcel of a whole syndrome of injustices. Let Africa find its rightful place in the world economy, and AIDS will go away. Make international agricultural policy favorable to Africa, for example, and Africa will blossom. AIDS will fade away because people will be able to earn their living and feed themselves properly. If you don't want to help so much, send us more medicine. Now, that's very radical, but you were asking me to speak up, so that's what I would say.

You're suggesting that AIDS is a disease of poverty.

A disease of poverty and of hopelessness, of conflict, of suffering, of all the things that happen because we are countries that cannot produce, cannot export, cannot run ourselves well, are often at war and full of refugees, full of corruption. Africa's woes are complicating factors when it comes to AIDS.

The second thing I'd say to the West is: Listen, listen, listen. It is so hard for Africa to get a word in edgewise. If there are 10 people in a room and two or three are from Europe, the United States or India, the Africans won't speak. One reason they won't speak is that the whites and the

Indians will take up all the air space and airtime. As soon as there's a silence, somebody's going to fill it.

We in the West are also tolerant only of our own repertoire of responses. If an African echoes what we already know and think, fine, that's a suitable remark. But when Africans question our assumptions, the blocking and the nonhearing kick in, and the Westerners start talking louder. Project that onto the world stage, and you find that Africa is not on the agenda. Or if it is on the agenda, other people are going to talk and decide. For Africa I say, Could we please be on the agenda? Could we please speak?

I find it painful when people in the West pontificate: "those people" have no respect for life, or life is cheap in Africa. In the United States, to have a child if the child is going to die is read as the height of irresponsibility: How could you have that child if you knew that child was going to die? But in Africa, the irresponsibility is not to have the child, not to give him a chance, not to let him pass on. Having more children is better than a few and certainly much better than none. Physical death is not the end; there's a continuum of life understood between the not born, the ones that we call the living, and the living dead. It's one community, and we're all in transition. The not-yet-born are anxious to be born, and those who have gone ahead of us care for us and are waiting for us, and life is greater than us.

How do you respond to those who see condoms as a main means of H.I.V. prevention?

Westerners feel very strongly that the condom is the mini-



Michael Czerny, S.J., speaks at the 15th International AIDS conference in Bangkok, Thailand, July 13.

mal responsible thing to do. But this is to make sexuality into a very individual choice: the exercise of sexuality is not embedded in marriage, much less in the larger cultural context. It comes instead from the idea that I am the sovereign of my behavior and I can do what I want, with whom I want, when I want, as long as I don't involve children or use violence. Within that range of choices, which is practically infinite, I am also responsible for using a condom.

If you have one dollar as disposable income per day, how much would you set aside for condoms? If you're a woman, what are you going to do—buy them with the hope that the guy will use them? It just doesn't start at all from African reality.

In Africa, sexual expression is rarely consensual and often coerced. Also—this is very important and why I feel the condom is not the answer—much of the propagation of H.I.V. is older men giving it to younger girls. It's not boys and girls who “can't keep their pants on,” though today people like to project that image. It's what we call sugar daddies, and to a certain extent sugar mommies, adults who are “buying” sex with younger people and spreading H.I.V. When you're a very poor girl and an older man is horny, and he'll give you a blouse or money for your cellphone, which you desperately need, what are you going to do?

How would you contrast Western and African approaches to illness?

I might be oversimplifying, but if you hear of a sickness in the West, basically you look for a biomedical reason. Something has gotten into the person, some kind of a bug, or some mechanical or hydraulic or electronic part has gone wrong—it's a “man as machine” approach, which is all very logical and makes perfectly good sense.

In Africa they're more likely to wonder, Who could wish evil on this person? Or, How has this person destroyed or damaged the relationships within which he or she exists? What kind of violence has he or she harbored against parents or relatives? The something that's wrong is relational rather than microbiological.

Jesus himself said that the evil thoughts we harbor are the real sources of adultery, murder and so on. Today we in the West read that in a very psychological way; we cannot see such things relationally. But when we harbor evil thoughts about somebody, is there no effect? Jealousies, anger, desire for vengeance—clearly they make us and others unhappy. They're powerful. We've turned them into abstractions, but they are very, very real.

What does the kingdom of God look like in this setting?

If you accept the distinction between curing and healing, then the kingdom is all about healing.

The curing model, if I may use it this way, is to remedy the biochemical, electronic or mechanical problem: stop the cells from multiplying or stop the gland from overproducing. To me the paradigm for healing is Jesus touching the leper. First he said, Of course I want to heal you; then he reached out and touched him. For me, that is God in the time of AIDS. He really wants to heal and reaches out to touch. Healing is to be touched, therefore to be treated humanly, to be included and able to feel that you're okay. We are God's way of reaching and touching. He can't do it without us.

One thing that never gets told are the thousands of miracle stories that have happened since AIDS began, the thousands of times that God has acted through people, and people have healed and helped people. I'll tell you the most extraordinary story. This guy had worked somewhere in the city and came back to his village and raped this girl and gave her H.I.V. Soon enough the disease started to act on him. He got sick, and the people all turned on him. The only one who would care for him was that girl, and she cared for him until he died. There are many stories like that of healing and forgiveness and reconciliation.

That view of the kingdom brings us back to your initial point.

For a mother who is very sick with AIDS, pills are not going to make her happy. They might cure some illnesses for a while, but they won't cure AIDS and they certainly won't heal her. What she most needs to know is that her kids are going to be taken care of; then she will die in peace. That's healing. What do we have to do to bring healing to that mother? We have to deal with her children's schooling, with what they're going to eat and drink, with who's going to take them in. Those are tough things to guarantee. Healing is tougher than handing out pills.

Some theologians are saying in a gingerly way that AIDS is also *kairos*, a moment of truth that involves judgment and grace and opportunity: “The time has come. A moment of truth has arrived.” In a very mysterious way, the pandemic gives a chance to live the Gospel and to be church in ways that otherwise maybe we wouldn't have.

I've been working in Africa four years now. One of the things that I've learned is, the AIDS mission of the church is a mission of 100 years. We're in the first years of a situation that's going to take a century to deal with. It's not like a tsunami, a sudden disaster that has to be met immediately. In terms of deaths in Africa, we have a tsunami every six weeks, and the economic damage I don't know how to reckon. But if this really is a 100-year mission, then it's a *kairos*, a providential chance for the church to learn what it means to be church, and for us to learn what Christ left us to do here. A

Farming With Junk

A rumination on fidelity

BY KYLE KRAMER



ART BY DAN SALAMIDA

AT DAWN I FIRED UP my old Ford farm tractor. It is three years older than I am and the same age as my wife, who has weathered the decades far better than it has. Various fluids leak out when it is parked or running. The power steering works only occasionally. The engine runs hot if it has worked too hard or too long, and sometimes it tries to keep running even after the ignition is shut off. Most of the gauges have long since ceased to function.

Likewise, my AGCO manure spreader predates me by a decade or two. It is held together by bailing wire, spreads as much manure through the rotted floorboards as by the beaters and breaks almost every time I use it, requiring that I shovel it out by hand for repairs. My lawn tractor throws sparks when the blades scrape the bent mowing deck. My brush hog now has more welded patches than original metal. And I am the only person in the vicinity who can get my weed trimmer started and keep it running. Like many of the small farmers I know, I farm with junk.

The tractor engine caught and sputtered, needing more choke, belched a cloud of blue-grey oil smoke from worn valve guide seals and finally smoothed out into a slow idle. With a complaining whine of hydraulic pumps and squealing of worn brakes, the rusty old machine took me and my chainsaw down into the woods to drag out logs for firewood.

In spite of their ragged appearance and general tiredness, my machines still do their work, even if not as quickly or as well as they used to. My old tractor still

KYLE KRAMER is the director of lay degree programs at Saint Meinrad School of Theology in Saint Meinrad, Ind.

mows hay; pulls a plow, disk and rototiller; frees stuck pickup trucks; and starts pretty much every time I need it to. I still have a barn to park it in, unlike my neighbor Jack, whose barn almost burned down when his old Allis-Chalmers tractor spontaneously short-circuited, sending sparks that ignited a nearby pile of straw.

Farmers, even romantic ones, are by necessity a practical and pragmatic folk. Small-scale farming like ours is often a break-even enterprise at best, so while most of us would love brand-new equipment, we simply cannot afford it. We cannot even afford the time or cash to make all of the repairs we would like on our old equipment. So we limp along and make the best out of what we have.

Unlike another neighbor of mine, who can make a new machine old within a season, I recognize the limits of my equipment, which was old when I bought it. I try to be easy on it, not ask more of it than it can deliver—as I would with an elderly person walking gingerly on a trick knee or a weak hip. In fact, my fleet of aging machines reminds me of an elder-care facility. Like a good orderly bringing meal trays and changing bedpans, I dutifully check and change oils and filters, grease fit-

tings, sharpen blades and weld or replace many broken parts. Like an older man always ready to volunteer information about his current medical maladies, organizing his time around pill schedules and doctor's appointments, I keep a running inventory in my head of my machines' various ailments and handicaps.

My inventory has three columns. The first is "critical" or "code red"; it includes all the interventions necessary to get the equipment to run another day. You cannot shrug off a flat tire or broken water pump any more than you can keep going about your day after a heart attack.

The second column is the longer-term, "strategic" repairs and maintenance, like replacing leaking seals instead of continually adding more hydraulic fluid or rebuilding my wheezing tractor engine. These things, like recommendations to diet and exercise for longer life and better health, I attend to in fits and starts. As often as not, unfortunately, the leaky seal does not get replaced until it has become the blown seal—just like the person who waits until after bypass surgery to get serious about eating right and going to the gym.

Of course, there's the third column, my wish list, my non-urgent, non-essential, postpone-able, "wouldn't-it-be-nice-if" list. Wouldn't it be nice to sandblast and repaint the old tandem disk? Wouldn't it be nice to get a new tractor seat, even if the old torn one still holds my rear end? I don't think I've ever gotten to anything on this list. My equipment is aged and tired; why try to hide it? Why ask it to be anything but what it is: proudly and unapologetically old?

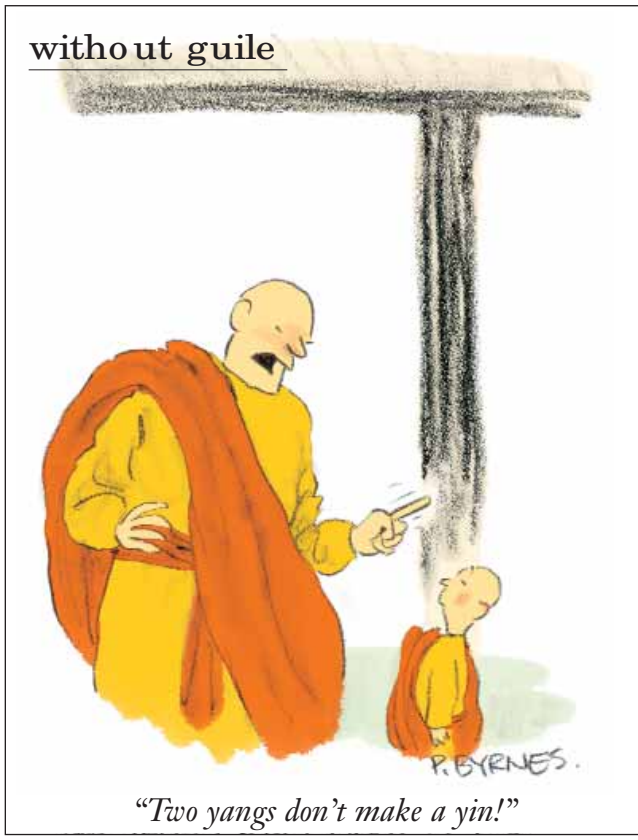
I won't lie—if a pile of money fell into my lap, I would likely do my farming quite happily with a brand-new, turbo-diesel, four-wheel-drive tractor and shiny new implements. But necessity, pragmatism

and the lack of an inheritance or winning lotto ticket are not the only things keeping old junk equipment going on my farm and the farms of my neighbors. Perhaps on some level we feel that "they don't make 'em like they used to," that newer is not necessarily better. We pride ourselves on the ability to keep things together with bailing wire, duct tape and crossed fingers, rather than computer diagnostics, specialty tools and factory training.

For all our practicality, I suspect that one of the less-admitted reasons we keep old equipment around is that we have grown attached to it, even as it rusts away. On the deepest level I think we realize—or fancy—that our equipment has been faithful to us and deserves the same from us. To be a good farmer demands fidelity, a degree of patience and commitment that seems out of vogue in a culture always fascinated with the future and the next new thing. We farmers deal with very old things: the ageless cycle of seasons and uncertain weather, the necessary bonds of family and community and the land itself—the source and sustenance of all living things, which might build an inch of topsoil over a thousand years but lose it to carelessness and erosion in just a few.

And what or who, after all, does not get old? We all run down; we all live within ever-encroaching limits of time or energy or health. So how do we respond to this undeniable fact? Do we—as farmers and as a society—pretend we can run and hide from mortality, finitude and age? Do we hide wrinkles or rust, constantly trade in our spouses or our equipment for younger models, look the other way from anyone or anything whose age and infirmity remind us of our own inevitable decline and demise?

Or do we pledge fidelity to the old things—and old people—that have given us much over a long life? Do we recognize that they might still have some life left in them and contributions to make, even as they get crotchety and need more attention and care, even as they struggle with incontinence of mechanical or bodily fluids? Do we honor these long lives and accompany them to the scrap heap or the grave with thanksgiving and gentleness? Do we show a little mercy and tender affection in the hope that as we age, break down and become less able, others might show us the same? **A**



CARTOON BY PAT BYRNES

15 Minutes to Let God Lead

Walking with Francis de Sales and Ignatius Loyola

BY THOMAS B. CURRAN

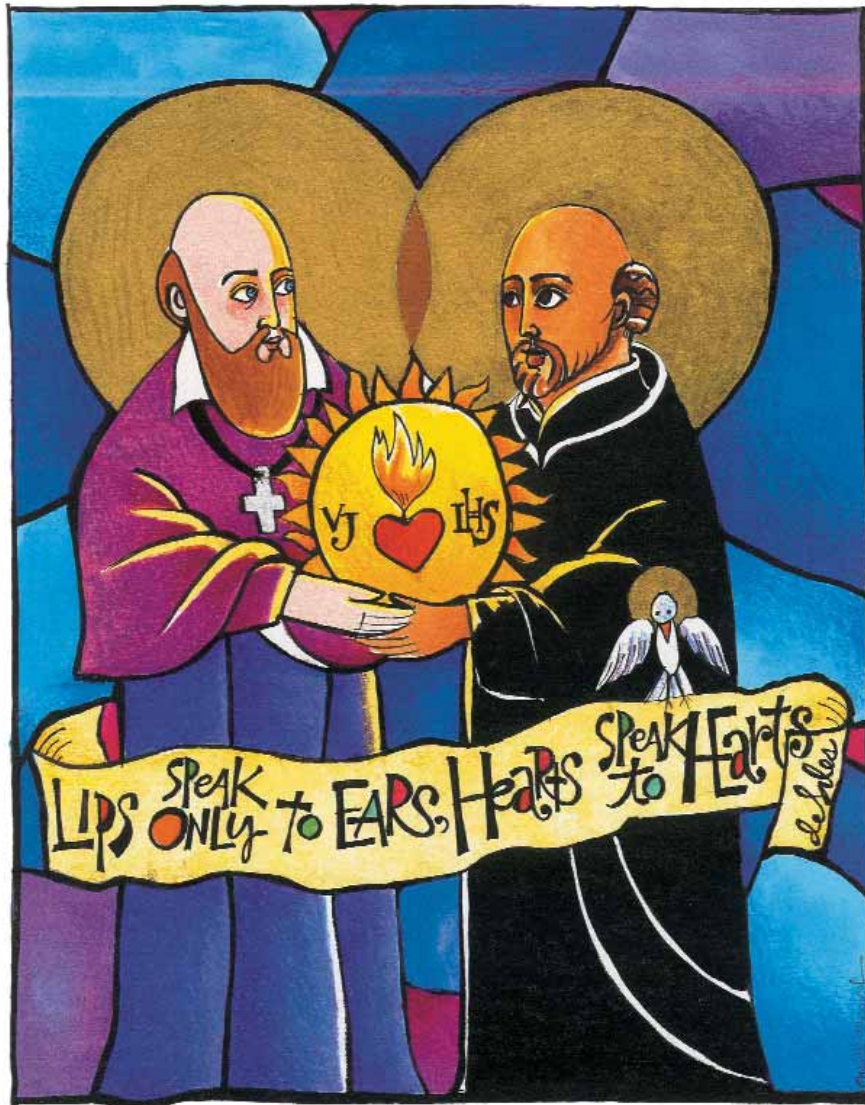
A CLOCK outside my office chimes every 15 minutes. Each quarter hour, I am reminded of how a particular meeting is progressing, how much longer until my next appointment. An old family heirloom, this clock serves as one of the threads connecting my formation in the Salesian world with my more recent experiences in the Ignatian cosmos.

I am a member of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, an international congregation of priests and brothers whose purpose is to spread the charism of St. Francis de Sales. We do this in a variety of ministries but primarily in schools, missions, parishes and on military bases. We are part of a Salesian family that

includes the Visitation Sisters, the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales and the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales.

So what is a member of Oblates of St. Francis de Sales doing in a Jesuit universi-

THOMAS B. CURRAN, O.S.F.S., is president of Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Mo.



ty? During my first year as the president of Rockhurst University, a Jesuit institution, I have met many people who ask: "So, I understand that you are not a Jesuit?" Others, when they discover that I live with the Kansas City Jesuit community, playfully inquire, "How are you surviving with all those Jesuits?"

My responses to both questions are

and consulted a Jesuit as his spiritual director until his death.

One might say that Francis de Sales was a "man for others." A civil and church lawyer, he became the bishop of Geneva, where he encountered violent Calvinists in a post-Reformation era. Unlike Ignatius Loyola, de Sales did not have military training, though he was trained as a

positive ones. I politely try to reintroduce myself, explaining that I prefer to identify myself by who I am (a De Sales oblate) rather than by who I am not (a Jesuit). Most questioners then proceed to inquire about St. Francis de Sales and my congregation. To the question about how am I surviving with all those Jesuits, I respond, "Very well." Why wouldn't that be the case? St. Francis de Sales had much of his early training and formation with the Jesuits; he cherished his Jesuit education in Paris; and the Jesuits who instructed him hoped that he would join their ranks. While his theology is Augustinian and Thomistic, Francis de Sales's spiritual practices are rooted in his Ignatian formation. He made the Spiritual Exercises

swordsman. Nevertheless, he engaged the hostile opposition with charity and gentleness, which earned him the appellation “the gentleman saint.” His motto was “gentle and firm” (*suaviter et fortiter*). De Sales engaged the Calvinists through the use of pamphlets and instructions that he wrote by hand and distributed throughout the region. His prolific and persuasive writings, found to be without error, later led to his being named one of 33 doctors of the church and the patron saint of writers.

Walking With Ignatius and Francis

Were the Society of Jesus to be dissolved, Ignatius once conjectured, it would take him 15 minutes of prayer to reconcile himself. Francis de Sales was once asked how long he went without being aware of the presence of God; his response, too, was 15 minutes. For both masters, “abandonment” and “holy indifference” capture how they lived their lives and instructed those who follow them. To put it bluntly, each will “spot” us 15 minutes to get re-focused on letting God lead us and not vice versa.

As a university president, I struggle to

keep up with the correspondence my position requires. I marvel at the amount of time that each of these two masters made for writing letters of instruction and spiritual direction, and I aspire to do something similar. Ignatius wrote close to 7,000 letters in a 16-year period as superior general of the Society of Jesus. Francis de Sales’s writings fill 28 volumes, 12 of which include letters to those to whom he was giving spiritual direction. He also found time to write *The Introduction to the Devout Life* and *Two Treatises on the Love of God*.

Ignatius’ foundational principles can be found in his *Spiritual Exercises*; Francis de Sales’s are in his *Spiritual Directory*. In these works and in their other writings, one finds a holistic approach to holiness, rooted in a psychology that recognizes the feelings and affect of life. Ignatius’ approach attempts to draw out one’s desires, hopes and dreams through the use of imagination. Francis de Sales’s strong sensory approach can be seen in his abundant use of poetry and natural history to describe how one understands and experiences God.

Both men wanted all people to pursue

holiness. They rejected the notion that holiness was restricted to those entering monasteries, seminaries and convents. Instead, they were convinced that all people can find God in the world without necessarily being of the world. Their approach was validated in the Second Vatican Council’s “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” which focused on the universal call to holiness.

So what is a member of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales doing in a Jesuit university? Partnering with the Jesuits and lay colleagues in building up the kingdom of God. In Jesuit institutions we pursue doing “all for the greater glory of God.” For Salesians, it’s a matter of doing the ordinary extraordinarily well, which involves the practice of the little virtues of charity, gentleness, humility and meekness. We say we try to “live Jesus.” Like hand and glove, the Ignatian and Salesian approaches complement one another.

Be Who You Are

Francis de Sales instructs us to “be who you are and be it well.” I recall this especially when asked if I would ever consider becoming a Jesuit. I contend that my selection to be president by the Jesuits and trustees was based on my being who I am and being it well. Who I am also explains why I am comfortable living with the Kansas City Jesuits. I do not need to be a Jesuit to participate in Jesuit ministries.

As a community of students, faculty and staff, we have an opportunity to make God’s good world better, a goal consistent with the Ignatian idea that all are called to be co-creators. This does not mean that we act impetuously or without reflection. Ignatius and Francis de Sales both stress the importance of setting aside time daily to reflect on where one has met God and where one has avoided God. For both saints, this means “living in the present moment.”

Francis de Sales also recommends a thorough, annual, spiritual self-examination, which he likens to the need “to remove the rust and dust” in one’s clock or watch so that it can be wound up for daily devotion to God. After one year as president of Rockhurst, I understand now more than ever that my office clock and my heart both need to keep well those quarter hours. After all, I have but 15 minutes to get focused on letting God lead. **A**



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In Highland County With Donald McCaig

One writer visits another,
whose life is about to change.

BY MICHAEL FEDO

I MET THE WRITER Donald McCaig a decade ago on a sheep farm he had created for himself near Williamsville, Va., (pop. 16) in rural Highland County. He had left the tense and competitive ad game in New York more than 25 years earlier. My wife, Judy, and I went for a weeklong stay.

Though not particularly drawn to bucolic settings—with or without sheep—I had noticed a classified ad for a writer's retreat, a shepherd's cottage on the McCaig spread, available for \$100 per week. The price was right, and I needed a respite from teaching and a chance to recover from my disappointment over failure to place a story collection with a publisher.

At that time, I knew Donald McCaig as a contributor to National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" but had not yet read any of his books. I learned that in 1971 he had abandoned a lucrative career as an advertising mogul in New York for a dilapidated farmhouse that he and his

MICHAEL FEDO, the author of seven books, including *The Man From Lake Wobegon* and *One Shining Season*, lives in Minnesota.

wife, Anne, restored. There they had set about raising sheep and training border collies. I was intrigued by a man who, unlike many 60s-era back-to-the-land proponents, remained committed to the ideals of the counterculture.

Spartan Living

Prior to our arrival, McCaig told us not to expect resort amenities. The place, though adequate, was spartan, he wrote. "It's quiet here, and if you get down to it, you can get quite a bit [of writing] done."

Highland County seemed frozen in the 1930s. While we saw no goat carts or



horse-drawn wagons, rusted autos rested in farmyards, presumably to be cannibalized for the useable vehicle du jour. Dotted with marginal farms, the region's buildings and hollow-eyed inhabitants called to mind Depression-era photographs by Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. "Any farmer here making \$10,000 a year is doing relatively well," McCaig told me.

The rental cottage, a short hike from the Cowpasture River, at the foot of geode-spawning Bullpasture Mountain, had been erected in a pasture full of thistles and tall grass that hid mounds of sheep



Downtown Williamsville, Va., population 16.

spoor we had to negotiate on our way to the tiny two-hole outhouse 15 paces from the front door. Masking tape crisscrossed one hole, and affixed above it was a hand-lettered "Out of order" sign that either reflected McCaig's puckish humor or indicated a real problem. (I never determined which during our stay.)

The cottage was an austere one-room affair with strips of flypaper dangling from the rafters. Aside from the drone of bugs and the gurgling of the nearby river, it was quiet at the farm. We woke each morning to the bleating of sheep and McCaig's whistling as he coaxed his dogs through herding routines. During the first three days at the cottage, I felt blocked, despite McCaig's sense that the serenity could elicit production. Apparently I needed to adjust to an absence of ambient suburban sounds—lawnmowers, cars or children at play. Finally I began an essay I would complete upon returning home.

Near the end of the week, I exchanged books with McCaig. He gave me his memoir, *An American Homeplace*, and I gave him *One Shining Season*, my book about major league baseball's one-year wonders. He had declined my offer of *The Man From Lake Wobegon*, which I had published eight years earlier. "I don't care to read about Garrison Keillor," he told me. "We cover the same sort of territory, and I don't need to know anything more about him. But baseball's another matter."

Sequel to *Gone With the Wind*

Donald McCaig lived a dual existence in New York: a well-dressed adman by day, a habitué of East Village poetry readings and leftist political gatherings by night. He was also a member of Students for a Democratic Society.

After purchasing the run-down farm near Williamsville, he reported his income fell by 90 percent during the first year.

His world is now about to change. In November, St. Martin's Press will release his new novel, *Rhett Butler's People*, the second sequel to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. A surfeit of cash awaits him, as the publisher has ordered an initial print run of more than one million hard-cover copies.

Trustees for the Margaret Mitchell estate selected McCaig to write the book after negotiations with the best-selling author Pat Conroy broke down over Conroy's apparent insistence on more artistic freedom than the trustees were willing to grant. McCaig, perhaps better known for his contributions to "All Things Considered," was anointed after estate representatives read his own Civil War novel, *Jacob's Ladder*.

McCaig has written more than a dozen books, including novels, poetry and nonfiction, and has received noteworthy reviews and honors. Recent photos of him show a 60-something man in a wide-brimmed hat. His mustache is white, as

are his striking eyebrows, which resemble those of a sheepdog. I wondered if, despite his preference for border collies, he also felt an affinity for the Old English Sheepdog, the breed most often associated with shepherding, and cultivated that image.

'Don't Teach Writing'

During my stay, McCaig offered writerly advice. "Believe in your work," he said. "Stay the course. But don't teach writing if you don't have to. Your students assume you will mentor them forever, and you could spend weeks every year reading their probably unpublishable manuscripts, and struggle to find graceful ways to tell them that. No matter what you say, and how you say it, they'll be hurt and angry. In my experience, you'll avoid this unpleasantness by declining teaching gigs from the get-go."

This was advice to which I did not hearken, and of course McCaig was right. Years after I stopped teaching creative writing, I continue to receive correspondence from former students requesting reactions to books and other pieces they have written, along with the anticipation that I will recommend an agent or a publisher for the material.

Donald McCaig may no longer deal with former students. *Rhett Butler's People* presumably will make him rich enough to engage a secretary to dispatch form letters like: "Because of the extraordinary demands on his time, Mr. McCaig regrets he is unable to undertake evaluation of your manuscript."

I wonder though, as he draws considerable national attention and wealth from *Rhett Butler's People*, if he will feel comfortable at his homestead in the placid, impoverished environs of Highland County. **A**

Christian, Buddhist, Jewish and Muslim Conversations



- Joseph H. Ehrenkranz, Ph.D.
- Honorable Charles D. Gill, CT Superior Court Judge
- Robert Jingen Gunn, Ph.D.
- Yeou-Cheng Ma, M.D., FAAP
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Other Books by Donald McCaig

Nop's Trials: A Novel
(Random House, 1984)

Eminent Dogs, Dangerous Men
(Harper Collins, 1991)

An American Homeplace
(Crown, 1992)

*Jacob's Ladder. A Story of Virginia
During the War* (Turtleback Books, 2003)

A Useful Dog
(Univ. of Virginia Press, 2007)

*Canaan: A Novel of Post-Civil War
America* (Norton, 2007)

It's About Tradition

Passing on the Faith Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims

Edited by James L. Heft, S.M.
Fordham Univ. Press, 321p \$22
ISBN 9780823226481

This is an important book for the crucial question it raises and its mode of response, as much as for how well it succeeds. It asks about “how to pass on religious tradition to youth in the context of the contemporary culture of the United States.” The response, derived from papers of a symposium held at the University of Southern California in October 2004, brings together scholars and practitioners from Judaism, Islam and Christianity to learn from one another across religious lines. Recognizing our common task and challenge, the contributors also look at success stories—congregations that are effective in “passing on the faith,” while avoiding both fundamentalism and relativism.

In every era, all communities of religious tradition face the make-or-break issue of “passing on the faith” to following generations. From our contemporary perspective, however, it seems that this was more easily done in bygone days, and mostly through cultural osmosis. Time was when particular faiths were distinctly located and combined with their cultures for a powerful marinade that could seep in to the marrow. Not only was this true in the villages of “the old countries”; it was replicated in many communities of the New World as well. Anyone who grew up in a 1950s Catholic family and parish in Boston, for example, will remember that taking on Catholic identity was almost inevitable (and had a lasting effect). Even for people who might try to erase that primary socialization, the traces remained. Now, such enclaves have largely disappeared in the United States and even more so in Europe. The essays in *Passing on the Faith* provide an insightful summary of the key reasons.

One is the cultural and religious pluralism of today’s “villages,” coupled with the often counter-inculturation by the

media in various forms. Just imagine: “as the Millennials build their entertainment cocoon,” 71 percent say that pornography is their first choice, reports Jack Miles. Another is the insistence on personal decision in all matters, making today’s youth “more autonomous in what they want to continue of the practices and beliefs” of their parents (James L. Heft). Add here the diminished credibility of religious authorities as well as the “unchecked commodification” of religion that presents “reductive and pandering expressions” of faith traditions (Miles). Such watering down and sugar-coating may first appear effective but encourages only a “therapeutic deism” (Christian Smith) among young people instead of “real commitments to religious ideas and ways of life that make demands on them” (Nancy Ammerman).

Besides reviewing the difficulties, various essays help to summarize important sociological studies on the religious attitudes and practices of American youth and young adults. The overwhelming conclusion, Heft points out, is that “all religious traditions in the United States face extraordinary challenges, given [our] pluralistic and consumerist culture.”

This book resolutely eschews the typical hand-wringing about the indifference of young people to religion, and their naïveté in attempting to be “spiritual but not religious,” to “believe without belonging.” Instead, it makes clear from success stories in all three traditions, that it is possible for faith communities to “pass on” their faith effectively.

The formulas for success seem surprisingly obvious. Young people need a life-giving faith community in which they feel included and respected and in which they can actively participate; they need to have “a sense of ownership” and “to be

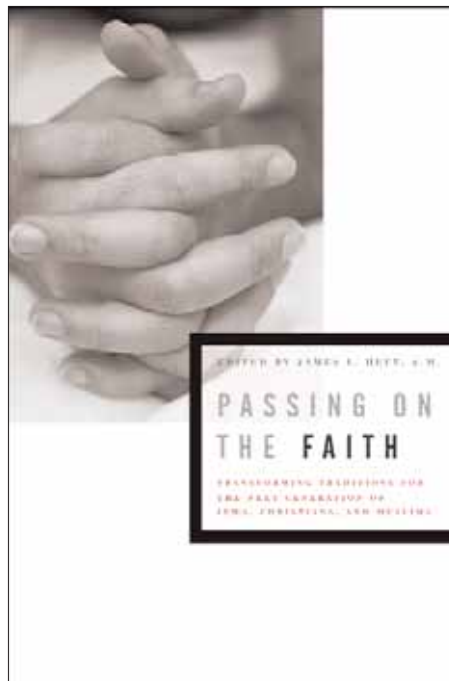
Book Reviews

met where they are” (Tobin Belzer and others). They need to participate in both personal and communal religious practices; these practices, however, must be “real prayer” and “real worship” rather than mere tokens (Br. John of Taizé).

Young people need a thorough grounding in their own faith tradition—“nonreductive and nonpandering”—and yet should be readied to “bridge in an open and dialogical way the ever-increasing religious pluralism of the contemporary world.” (Peter Phan’s review of the theological warrants for “religious identity and belonging amidst diversity and pluralism” is helpful here.) Participa-

tion in the works of justice and compassion is particularly effective to “inspire and require” faith commitment in young people (Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon). Of course, it helps if a congregation has a staff person who can “connect well with youth” (Heft). And instead of putting all responsibility on the congregation, parents should practice all of the above, in their own way, within the family (Smith).

I note with appreciation the consistent attention to language. The Rev. Melchor Sánchez de Toca argues that contemporary faith needs “a new language that takes into account both intelligence and emo-



The Reviewers

Thomas H. Groome is professor of theology and religious education at Boston College, where he is also director of the Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry. His most recent book is *What Makes Us Catholic* (Harper, 2003).

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy, a freelance writer, is a member of the Saints Francis and Thérèse Catholic Worker Community in Worcester, Mass.



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Shawnessey Custer

Lay Pastoral Minister, City Parish
Certificate in Spiritual Direction, Aquinas Institute
Master of Divinity, Aquinas Institute

A spiritual longing for something deeper started Shawnessey’s search that took her to a Benedictine Abbey, her local pastor and finally to Aquinas Institute. A one day visit led her to a Certificate in Spiritual Direction and, with the help of her advisors, teachers and her own discernment, to a Master of Divinity. She’s now a full time lay minister in an active city parish.

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tion.” Ammerman proposes that youth need to be “culturally bilingual,” knowing well the “native parochial language” of their own faith and also having accessible language to represent their faith in the public realm. The book’s introduction by James Heft is a fine overview of what follows, and the two closing essays by Jack Miles and Diane Winston raise further questions while pointing forward with hope.

As with all books, one could note weaknesses, beginning with the standard comment that essay collections are uneven. Also, the title and theme of “passing on the faith” could be taken to suggest that any faith is a static affair to be simply “passed” from generation to generation. For Christians, this would not reflect the “fresh waters” that Jesus promised to the Samaritan woman and to Christians ever after (John 4), nor his urging that scribes learned in the reign of God must take “from the treasury both new and old” (Mt 13:52). Though the collection brings together a distinguished coterie of commentators, none could be identified as a scholar of religious education—the academic discipline defined by its concern for “passing on the faith.” This lacuna is particularly evident when authors force sociological descriptions to become prescriptive.

Nonetheless, this is an excellent resource that should be read by anyone interested in youth and the continuity of religious tradition.

Thomas H. Groome

O Troubled Town of Bethlehem

The Collaborator of Bethlehem

An Omar Yussef Mystery

By Matt Beynon Rees
Sobo Crime. 264p \$22
ISBN 9781569474426

Last December, the Welsh journalist Matt Beynon Rees resigned as Jerusalem bureau chief for Time magazine, a position he had held for six years, and began writing crime fiction. Rees, who still contributes to the magazine, admits that a “bit of a

beef” with an editor influenced the decision. But his real quarrel with journalism was about format. The medium’s “banal” commitment to balance and editors’ “reluctance to offend” imposed a formula on his writing about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and he says he found himself submitting prescribed stories that revealed little.

“It is sort of back-to-front to turn to fiction to make the news more real,” Rees acknowledges. “But the way the news makes people not so interested in these bloody conflicts is it turns them into political issues where really they are issues of humanity.”

In this, his first novel, Rees uses the simple format of a detective mystery to investigate the complex realities of the Palestinian experience. Set in the Bethlehem of 2002, a city ensnared in the violence of the second intifada (Palestinian uprising), *The Collaborator of Betlehem* tells the story of Omar Yussef, a Muslim schoolteacher turned amateur sleuth, who works to save the life of a former student, a Christian, accused of collaborating with the Israelis in the assassination of a Palestinian militant. There is something perversely optimistic in Yussef’s pursuit of one particular murder during a time of so much killing. His probe takes him into the intimate spaces of his Bethlehem neighbors, where confessions are made and hopes and anguishes revealed.

Effectively suspenseful, *The Collaborator*, which was recently nominated for the 2007 Quill Award, is an impressive example of its genre. Yet there is more than a well-told murder mystery here. Through the popular medium of crime fiction, Rees “makes real” a people too often simplistically perceived as victims or perpetrators in a protracted conflict.

Simmering within the pressure cooker of the Israeli occupation and riddled with internal divisions, Bethlehem is an imploding city. Racketeering gunmen, posing as liberators, commit extortion on the locals. Clan allegiance has supplanted the rule of law; and Christians and Muslims, who once shared an intimate peace, now live “more separately and a little more hatefully.” Hovering over all are the Israelis, whose tanks and choppers kill swiftly and dispassionately.

Here in this city that “breeds mistrust” lives George Saba, a Palestinian Christian

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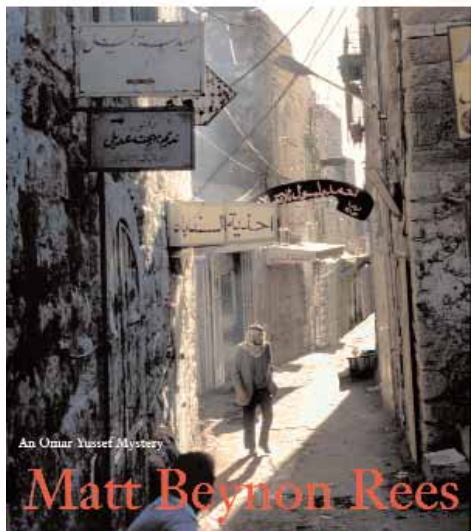
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who has recently returned from Santiago, Chile, with his wife and two small children. He is arrested by the Palestinian authorities for collaborating in the assassination of Louai Abdel Rahman, a Palestinian resistance fighter who was shot by an Israeli sniper while sneaking home one night to his young wife, Dima. Certain of George's innocence, Omar Yusef sets out to discover the real collaborator and thus exonerate one of his favorite students. In his quest, he navigates creepy confrontations with the head of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, suspects his close friend Khamis



The Collaborator of Bethlehem



Zheydan, a former P.L.O. militant and now Bethlehem's alcoholic police chief, and faces off with an injured gunman hiding out in the Church of the Nativity.

The foppish, middle-aged Yusef is an improbable hero, reminiscent of some Graham Greene characters. Prone to outbursts followed by bouts of self-criticism, he frets about the spattered mud on

his loafers and the appearance of a new liver spot on a hand that still shakes even though he gave up drinking 10 years ago. A teacher of history, he bemoans the violence that has made his students indiffer-

ent to death and their own futures. "When you are gone from the world, what will you leave behind?" he asks them. The question inspires Yusef's ornery courage and decency; the history teacher's preoccupation with legacy is one of the book's central themes. Unlike the despondent Zheydan, who has concluded life in occupied Bethlehem is a death sentence from which you try to "get a temporary remission," Yusef still cares deeply for the city's future.

Be forewarned: the book is no cozy mystery of the Agatha Christie variety, in which crimes are genteel and infrequent. Many people die during the course of Yusef's investigations. The victims are shot, knifed, blown up, beaten and hanged, and crushed by a collapsing wall during a missile attack. All the killings are based on true events Rees reported. *The Collaborator of Bethlehem* evokes the corpses depicted in actual news accounts, becoming complex human beings not unlike ourselves. Even the suicide bombers, whose tactics repel us, are given motives we can understand. "Usually they had something to prove," deduces Yusef.

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"Sometimes they were mentally unbalanced after they had witnessed the death of someone close to them in an Israeli attack. But most of the bombers wanted to show everyone that they were not the person people believed them to be."

The irony of all this killing occurring in the city of Christ's birth is not lost on Rees, who identifies himself as Christian. Some of the book's darkest passages are Yusef's reflections on the Church of the Nativity, inspired by the sight of yet another corpse. Distraught with grief, he concludes that in this church, once warmed by the presence of the divine, "there's no glowing spirit, no redemption." Implicit in the Muslim teacher's observation is a question for those who believe in what the Gospels record. What is happening to this city where God once walked?

While the violence of the Israeli Defense Force in occupied Bethlehem is a given in Rees's tale, it remains an unexamined given. His focus is on the internal divisions within Palestinian society, a subject he explored in an earlier work of non-fiction, *Cain's Field: Faith, Fratricide, and Fear in the Middle East*. The divisions within Israeli and Palestinian societies have been more of an impediment to the peace process than most people realize, says Rees. He believes Oslo failed because Yitzhak Rabin could not persuade his own people. But Bethlehem's woes seem inextricably linked to the overarching reality of occupation. Police corruption, the persecution of a minority, the emergence of local gunmen and collaborators and the descent into distrust: are not all of these the predictable fate of any community under lockdown and surrounded by guns? (Belfast 10 years ago? Present-day Iraq?)

Rees's story humanizes our understanding of what life is like under the gun. Although his characters are obviously ensnared in a political conflict, he describes their dilemmas in personal terms. We realize that even in bleak Bethlehem, people remain marvelously complicated, endowed with particular affections, regrets, flaws and strengths.

The Collaborator of Bethlehem is the first installment in what will be an Omar Yusef mystery series. Rumor has it the independent-thinking detective will surface next in Gaza. **Claire Schaeffer-Duffy**

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Letters

Staying the Course

The problem with your latest editorial on Iraq, "A Diplomatic Surge" (10/8), is that like many Democrats and some Republicans, you have embraced defeat. The template of the media and liberals in general at the very beginning of this war was and is defeat: This is Vietnam, and we can't win.

This is nonsense. The surge is working. We need to embrace and promote victory. This war has to be fought and won; otherwise we will have to fight again an emboldened and more ferocious terrorist enemy.

(Rev.) Leonard F. Villa
Yonkers, N.Y.

The Price of Security

America is to be highly commended for "The President's Man" (9/17), which points out how much this administration has sought to establish an imperial presidency that wants no checks and that has its own control of things, both domestic and foreign, uppermost in its mind. A further danger to democracy seems to me to be its desire to thwart freedom of information. All this is done while increasing fear in the people by such images as that of the mushroom cloud. It is not difficult to see why masses everywhere have often turned to a so-called strongman in time of national crisis, one who promises security at the price of freedom. In our history we have paid a great price for liberty. It is a shame that many are willing to pay even a higher price for freedom from fear.

Andy Galligan
Tracy, Calif.

Diversity of Opinions

Bravo for your issue on "Who Is Jesus?" (9/17). What a breath of fresh air. Thank you, editors, for taking this approach to the issue. How much more enjoyable it would have been had you included some female scholars, like Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M., Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., or Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, to name a few.

Paul Donohue, M.C.C.J.
Cincinnati, Ohio

Countercultural Saint

I was most grateful for the insights of James Martin, S.J., regarding Mother Teresa's letters ("Mother Teresa's Dark Night," 9/24). Such reflections not only serve as a preparation for reading *Come Be My Light*; they also address the key issue, the dark night of the soul, which is being misinterpreted by the secular press.

Some people think that it is unbelievable that her struggles would not be kept confidential. They are more comfortable remembering her as a woman whose remarkable deeds appeared to be connected to a closeness with God. Perhaps these people are caught in a society that accents success, quick solutions and the accumulation of wealth.

In Mother Teresa we have a woman who should be an inspiration to all of us. In the midst of experiencing deep spiritual struggles and serving people living in extreme poverty, she exemplified perseverance and deep trust in the mystery of our God.

Eileen Jaramillo
Lansing, Mich.

Desolation Versus Darkness

"Mother Teresa's Dark Night" was valuable, but I have the impression that the author did not fully appreciate the wisdom of Joseph Neuner, S.J., which enabled Mother Teresa to come to love the darkness. He evidently explained to her St. Ignatius' understanding of consolation and desolation. Her painful sense of the Lord's absence was not desolation, but consolation. For Ignatius, consolation is not simply feeling good and desolation feeling bad. This is part of the discernment of spirits. What is the source and what is the direction of the movement of the spirit? What St. John of the Cross calls the dark night of the soul is not desolation, in Ignatian language. It may well be consolation.

The painful longing and darkness she experienced was the feeling of the absence of the Lord, the deep desire for the presence of the Lord. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, not of the Spirit of Darkness.

Father Neuner gave her the advantage of the wisdom he had learned from

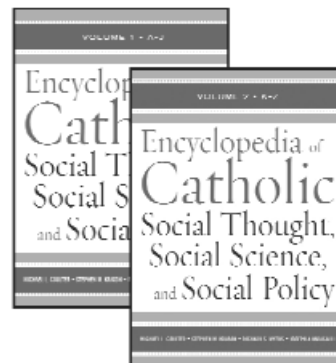
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Letters

the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and his teaching on the discernment of spirits. This is what she was talking about when she explained how it was that her sisters could leave a life of privilege and go out into the streets and minister to the poorest of the poor.

There was direct continuity between her experience of anguished longing for the presence of the Lord and her loving outreach to the dying in the streets of Calcutta.

*Gordon Moreland, S.J.
Orange, Calif.*

Question Authority

Thanks to James J. DiGiacomo, S.J., for “Educating for a Living Faith” (9/10), which presents challenges and helpful considerations regarding the “religious illiteracy” of many young (and not so young) people. It was heartening to find encouragement for having students ask: “Why? How do we know that?”

But as a teacher, I must disagree strongly with one admonishment: “If you let students ask questions, you had better know the answers.” Certainly this would restrict much questioning in any discipline. And when it comes to religion and the great mysteries of life, can any of us be audacious enough to really claim all the answers? Would it not be better to admit the far-from-startling fact that we, too, are still searching and then do our best to help students explore the questions by culling the best that theology, philosophy, science, psychology, sociology and other fields have to offer?

*Connie Widmer
Cincinnati, Ohio*

Reinforcing Stereotypes

I can appreciate the frustration of James T. Keane, S.J., with individuals who describe themselves as “spiritual” in *Of Many Things* (9/24). The term is sometimes code for an unexamined and/or noncommittal faith life, but I believe this occurrence is an exception rather than the rule. Unfortunately, the writer has unintentionally reinforced what he describes as an unfair characterization of religion: “the province of all things narrow-minded, dogmatic, intolerant, fanatical and old fashioned.” He prematurely

dismisses his students’ interest in *The Secret* and *Eat, Pray, Love* as an example of beliefs and practices that “cheapens the meaning of both religion and spirituality” rather than examining why they are embracing these messages.

As an alternative to speaking from a defensive soapbox, we self-described religious people need to ask two questions: first, what kind of faith are we practicing if popular culture continues to characterize it as “narrow-minded and dogmatic”; and second, why have movies like “The Secret” and “The Da Vinci Code” continued to capture the imagination of the public?

I have often wondered how we would have responded to a certain rabbi 2,000 years ago who spread a message about the “kingdom of God” and used stories, images and symbols of his day to communicate his message. Would we have accused him of a religious/spiritual approach that “hijacks the authority of spiritual traditions thousands of years old” and dismissed him?

*Frank De Vito
Lynn, Mass.*

Democracy Is Messy

The editorial “Restoring Worker Choice” (8/27) advocates removing a worker’s secret choice. The secret ballot is sacrosanct in America for good reason. The Employee Free Choice Act, purposely misnamed, would remove the safety of the secret ballot in deciding whether or not to organize a union. The Taft-Hartley law required secret ballots in union organizing because of many abuses. The proposed law would return to the world of those abuses. Democracy is messy, expensive and time-consuming; but, as Winston Churchill once quipped, it is a lot better than the alternative.

*Art Fleming
Pittsburgh, Pa.*

Election Protocol

“Restoring Worker Choice” (8/27) was extremely disappointing. Surely the N.L.R.A. and its reform deserve thoughtful and thorough consideration. But your remarks did not provide this.

Pointedly and repeatedly, your edito-

rial made the following assumption (in substance, though not in terminology): signed cards—gathered in an array of public settings with neither oversight nor due process—better capture the genuine will of workers about a volatile, contested issue than do secret-ballot elections supervised by a public agency.

Replacing private voting with public voting and urging that it become the law of the land goes counter to common sense, the literature of union organizers themselves, the practice of unions in calling for elections and opinion polls of union members and the general public. I would like to see **America** move beyond this shoot-from-the-hip approach and offer a series of substantial articles that match in density and detail the magnitude and urgency of this subject matter.

*John Glaser
Orange, Calif.*

Representative Shepherds?

The first thing that struck me when I looked at the photo of Latin American bishops in the article “Good News From Brazil” (8/27), was that there was not a brown face in the bunch.

*Brian Leen
Albuquerque, N.M.*

The Importance of Worms

“Horace McKenna, Apostle of the Poor” (9/17) brought back memories of the day in the mid-1940s when Father McKenna was invited to address us Jesuit novices and devoted a good bit of his talk to explaining the importance of earthworms for the growing of plentiful crops. Earthworms! We didn’t know what to make of him. Only later did we realize to what extent this testified to his identification with the struggling farmers to whom he ministered.

*Thomas L. Sheridan, S.J.
Jersey City, N.J.*

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Persistence in Prayer

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C), Oct. 21, 2007

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

“Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary” (Lk 18:1)

LUKE'S GOSPEL IS sometimes called “the Gospel of Prayer” because in it Jesus prays at the most important moments in his life and because it contains two substantial instructions devoted to Jesus’ teachings on prayer (11:1-13 and 18:1-14). In the first passage Jesus offers a sample prayer (the Lord’s Prayer) and gives encouragement to be bold and persistent in prayer, since God really wants to answer our prayers. The second prayer instruction reinforces the theme of persistence in prayer (today’s passage) and insists on the importance of humility in prayer (next Sunday’s text).

Luke introduces the parable of the persistent widow with the comment that it illustrates the need to “pray always without becoming weary.” Today’s Old Testament reading from Exodus 17 exemplifies that teaching in an almost cartoonish way. As long as Moses keeps his hands raised (presumably in prayer), Israel’s battle against the Amalekites goes well for them. When he puts down his hands, then Israel begins to lose. So Aaron and Hur come to Moses’ assistance, keeping his hands raised until evening. By that time Amalek has been defeated and Moses’ prayer has been answered. Here persistence in prayer is taken quite literally, even comically.

Today’s parable from Luke 18 features two characters: a widow and a judge. In the ancient world a widow was among the most defenseless and powerless persons; unless she had adult sons who were influential, a widow had no social standing and no political power. The other character is a judge, who in this case is an opportunist and a pragmatist, without respect for God or other people. One might imagine that nothing good could ever

come from any interaction between them, but when the widow brings her case before the judge, she prevails. She prevails not because she is influential or powerful and not because the judge is honest or compassionate. Rather, she prevails only because she is persistent. She keeps after the judge and finally wears him down. Because the widow will not take no for an answer, the judge decides to give her what she wants in the hope of getting rid of her. The point of Jesus’ parable is clear. If a defenseless and powerless widow can wear down a corrupt judge through her persistence alone, how much more can we expect that God, the just and merciful judge, will hear our prayers and answer them positively if we persist?

How can we pray “always”? When we hear the word “prayer,” most of us instinctively think of formal prayers like the Lord’s Prayer. And we should, since formal prayers are integral to Christian spirituality. There is another way of thinking about prayer in Christian life, however. It is the effort to make our whole life into a prayer—that is, to pray always. This kind of prayer involves offering all that we are and have and do to the service of God, calling ourselves into the presence of God at various times during our day and making all our personal encounters and actions into a kind of prayer. This form of prayer means bringing all our successes and failures, joys and sorrows, and highs and lows to God in prayer. This habit of prayer, of course, needs to be complemented by formal prayers. But the combination of the two can add up to praying always.

The reading of Scripture has often been the starting point for both formal and personal prayer in the Christian tradition. Today’s selection from 2 Timothy insists that “all Scripture is inspired by God.” In this context “Scripture” would have meant the Old Testament, since the



New Testament was still being written. Nevertheless, we can take the opportunity offered here to consider the place of Scripture in Christian prayer and spirituality. Scripture reveals to us that God the creator and Lord of all is the God of Israel and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture describes our history and religious heritage as the people of God; it provides us with the language and theology of prayer. Scripture serves as the repository of human wisdom and teaches us how to live wisely and justly. It also points us to Christ as the key, so that what is hidden in the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament.

For those who are serious about prayer, today’s Scripture readings provide good advice about both content and style. Scripture, both the Old Testament (especially the Psalms) and the New Testament (especially the Gospels), offer valuable starting points to prayer. The parable of the persistent widow encourages us to be bold and persistent in our prayers of petition. The challenge to pray always can open up for us a habit of prayer that encompasses our entire life.

Daniel J. Harrington

Praying With Scripture

- How does the parable of the persistent widow encourage you in your prayer life?
- What might it take for you to “pray always,” in the sense of making your entire life into a prayer?
- Do you use Scripture as a starting point for prayer? What texts do you find particularly consoling or challenging?

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