

# America

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## Faith in an Age of Skeptics

STEPHEN BULLIVANT • THOMAS J. BUSHLACK

THE DISTURBING BRILLIANCE  
OF 'ZERO DARK THIRTY'



# OF MANY THINGS

Even casual readers will notice the changes to our masthead. The really astute reader, however, will notice something even more significant. I'll give you a hint: Look to the top of the Contents page, just below the second uppercase T. See it? That's right: You are holding the 4999th issue of **America**. That means that our next issue will be a collector's item: so get out the cellophane sleeves and chill the champagne!

The 4000th issue was dated Oct. 1, 1988. My predecessor, George W. Hunt, S.J., wrote at the time that "we calculate that **America's** 5000th issue will appear sometime in the year 2010." Father Hunt was a typical Jesuit: a 790 on the verbal and a 510 on the math. He was right about one thing, though: He had the good sense to endorse a statement that John LaFarge, S.J., had made in the 2000th issue of the magazine. Addressing **America's** readers in 1947, Father LaFarge wrote, "We know that you can help us with your thoughts, your ideas, your prayers, your suggestions. We depend on you."

Indeed we do. **America** is never finished. We're always learning, growing, seeking new ways to bring you a smart Catholic take on faith and culture. So as we head into our 5000th issue, we're making some changes. For starters, new columnists will appear throughout the first half of 2013, beginning with our own James Martin, S.J., recently named **America's** editor at large. We also welcome Michael Rossmann, S.J., a blogger for The Huffington Post and the 2007 valedictorian at Notre Dame. Margot Patterson, former senior writer for The National Catholic Reporter will also join us, along with James T. Keane, a former associate editor of **America**, now at Orbis Books. Colleen Carroll Campbell will join us in June; Ms. Campbell was a speechwriter for President George W. Bush and is now the host of "Faith and Culture" on EWTN.

It might seem strange that **America** would have one columnist who used to

write for The National Catholic Reporter and another who wrote for George W. Bush. It doesn't seem strange to us, though. **America's** century-old motto is *Veritatem facientes in caritate*, "Doing the truth in love." There is no faithful Catholic voice that is not welcome in these pages; there is no quarter of the church in which **America** is not at home.

We will also add a new column in the Books & Culture section. Bill McGarvey, former editor of the Web journal Busted Halo, will lead off the commentary. He will be joined by Angela Alaimo-O'Donnell, professor and poet at Fordham University, and Daniel P. Horan, O.F.M., a young friar who just published *Francis of Assisi and the Future of Faith*. Also, longtime readers will welcome the return of the Philosopher's Notebook, a running commentary on faith and culture in the United States. John J. Conley, a Jesuit, philosopher and playwright at Loyola University Maryland, will pen the monthly column.

One last thing: You'll want to check out the revitalized Catholic Book Club. Each month Kevin Spinale, S.J., a teacher of English at Boston College High School, will introduce a book of special interest to Catholics. You can join that discussion at [www.americamagazine.org/cbc](http://www.americamagazine.org/cbc).

Of course, change can be bitter-sweet. With this issue, we also bid an affectionate farewell to columnists Margaret Silf, Maryann Cusimano Love, Kyle Kramer, John DiIulio and Thomas Massaro, S.J. We are grateful for their work, which has enriched us all. We hope to see them again soon.

Whew, that is a lot of change. This much, however, will never change: our commitment to bringing you the very best of who we are, each and every week. For your loyalty and trust, we thank you. For the greater glory of God, now it's on to 6,000!

**MATT MALONE, S.J.**

# America

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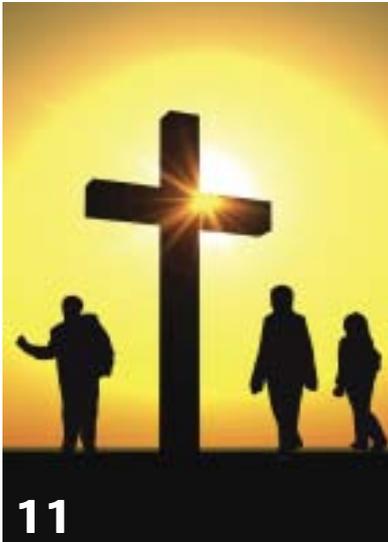
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Luke Hansen, S.J., explores whether President Obama might close the **Guantánamo prison**, right, in his second term. Plus, **Chris Haw** talks about his new book *From Willow Creek to Sacred Heart: Rekindling My Love for Catholicism*. All at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).



### Forty Years Hence

On Feb. 10, 1973, just 19 days after the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Roe v. Wade*, an associate editor of this magazine expressed fear that “this new law of the land” would “continue to be so, at least for the next few years and possibly for a very long time.” That editor’s dismal, worst-case scenario has come to pass: Last month marked 40 years since the U.S. Supreme Court established a limited constitutional right to abortion. Approximately one million abortions are now performed annually in the United States, a fact that should deeply pain the conscience of the nation.

Anniversaries are an ideal time for taking stock, and the pro-life movement must carefully assess the social and political realities. Frankly, it is a mixed bag. While an emerging conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court had raised our hopes for a complete reversal of *Roe*, most of the justices appear reluctant to do more than adjust the margins of that ruling. While there has been one reliably anti-abortion political party in the United States, Republicans nationwide, smarting from their losses in 2012, may move away from their anti-abortion orthodoxy in a misguided attempt to attract more voters. Meanwhile, the Democrats, who at one point seemed poised to welcome pro-life Democrats back into the fold, staged the most ardently “pro-choice” convention in memory in 2012. Still, broader public opinion favors at least some restrictions on abortion, a fact that neither party can afford to ignore and that no pro-life activist should take for granted.

There are other signs of hope: The thousands of people who attended the March for Life this year prove that the pro-life cause still has traction, especially among the young. Polls, too, show that an increasing number of young women describe themselves as pro-life. Pro-choice activists should not so easily link the push for women’s rights with the pro-choice cause. The success of the annual March for Life affirms another political reality: The most effective movements for change are sustained by grassroots support. Let us pray that this movement will continue to grow and thrive, that, 40 years hence, we will pause to celebrate a newfound culture of life in America, one that protects, in both principle and law, the most vulnerable among us.

### A Nation of Takers?

Here is a startling fact: About 96 percent of Americans benefit from some kind of government assistance. Whether the benefit is student loans or Medicare, chances are that at some point in your life you will receive public

aid. This figure is instructive regarding the role of government in the lives of citizens. The divide in this country is not between the “47 percent” who depend on government programs and those who do not. The story of government assistance is more complicated, more surprising and ultimately more vexing.

Consider this: The top 20 percent of households receive 10 percent of entitlement spending, yet they receive 66 percent of tax expenditure benefits. In other words, they receive a disproportionate share of tax breaks in the form of exemptions, deductions or credits. High earners also receive better benefits packages at work. While these benefits are not government assistance per se, the government has opted to let employers handle the disbursement of certain social resources. These facts should shape the way the government approaches social welfare. Sensible tax reform is within reach and could help to bridge the gap between rich and poor.

### Don’t Worry, Be Grateful

Robert Emmons, a psychologist at the University of California, Davis, has the enviable task (an emotion that is not similarly endorsed) of studying gratitude. In *Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*, Mr. Emmons tracks the many benefits realized by folks who have integrated gratitude into their busy lives and its positive impact on their general well-being. He has discovered that to be effective, gratefulness cannot take the form of ungracious self-approval. Good fortune must be appreciated as a gift, unearned, bestowed by God or another individual.

Fortunately, the attitude of gratitude itself does not necessarily follow this rubric. Mr. Emmons reports that gratitude is an emotional skill that can be cultivated—by making a daily habit, for example, of jotting down three things you are grateful for at bedtime or keeping a gratitude jar on the kitchen counter to collect notes recording blessings and thanks.

Now, thanks to the Internet, we can even share our gratitude with the world. The World Gratitude Map ([gratitude.crowdmap.com](http://gratitude.crowdmap.com)) tracks outbreaks of gratefulness across the earth in microposts from gratitudees, geographically e-pegged and telling tales of good fortune and thanks that can be read by all. Perhaps in the future U.N. quick-reaction teams can use the map to rush emotional resources to hotspots of ingratitude. The map has tracked thankfulness for a sunset in Cape Town, South Africa, heroic snowplowing in Nova Scotia and those times a great mom and a sister “have been there” in Boise, Idaho.

# After the Boom

It might not be evident from the prices at local gas stations, but the United States is in the midst of an oil boom of historic proportions. Driven by the explosive growth in shale oil wildcatting in Texas, Wyoming, North Dakota, Oklahoma and Ohio, U.S. oil producers are increasing output at the highest rate ever. The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that domestic oil production averaged 6.4 million barrels a day in 2012 and is expected to surge by 23 percent to reach 7.9 million barrels a day in 2014.

That record level of output is expected to transform the United States into the largest global oil producer by 2017, surpassing even oil-soaked Saudi Arabia. After years of handwringing over the cost of imported oil and the strategic and economic vulnerability oil imports propel, the United States may, remarkably, become a net exporter of oil by 2030.

That unexpected transformation will also yield higher tax revenues, more jobs and lower energy costs for other industries. It all sounds too good to be true. It, of course, is. Behind the boom lurk some considerable dangers.

*Environmental impact.* Much of the oil fueling the boom is extracted by hydraulic fracturing techniques, or “fracking,” a process more often associated with the boom, and now the glut, in natural gas. In terms of its long-term environmental and health impacts, fracking remains underscrutinized, but it has been associated with contamination of surface and well water, bizarre health effects on people and livestock, even methane-flaming water faucets and earthquakes. The burning of fossil fuels is also the primary driver of climate change and over time has a significant effect on human and ecological health. These environmental concerns must be evaluated without discrimination in balance with the possible economic and strategic rewards of greater oil independence.

*Intergenerational fairness.* In confronting climate change and issues related to sustainable economic growth in the future, Pope Benedict XVI has spoken of the need for both international and intergenerational solidarity. Just as the burdens of confronting climate change cannot morally be shifted to the world’s poorest and least powerful, neither can this generation’s responsibility to the next be discounted. The early 21st-century gas and oil boom in the United States continues a pattern of intense extraction and consumption of energy reserves that can never be replaced. It makes an irrevocable claim on a God-given resource now denied to the future. When U.S. politicians emphasize the national debt, many

speak of an unjust burden on their children and grandchildren because of the contemporary generation’s lack of restraint. The same moral call to restraint pertains to fossil-fuel reserves.

*Planning for the future.* While the oil boom may provide a welcome respite from the nation’s energy gloom, it is bound to be short-lived. Because of human ingenuity, resource extraction opportunities once considered impossible have become commonplace. But it remains certain that one day fossil fuel resources will be exhausted. Alternative, sustainable energy infrastructure must be in place when that day arrives. What will come eventually almost always arrives suddenly.

ExxonMobil analysts predict that oil will remain the primary global fuel through 2040, when natural gas will overtake coal for the number two spot. They predict that the use of nuclear power and renewable energy will grow, but renewable energy will still represent less than 10 percent of the total energy supply 30 years from today. That is an unacceptable outcome. The Obama administration has made confronting climate change a primary goal of the president’s second term. It should not allow this unanticipated oil abundance to distract from that commitment. Fossil fuels burned for energy contribute to climate change regardless of their domestic or imported origins.

The nations of Europe do not have the luxury of squeezing every last drop of oil and natural gas out of novel deposits like tar sands or shale. But the resource deficit in western Europe is not without a positive side. On the continent the inevitable alternative energy infrastructure is already emerging, while in the United States the matter is debated in Congress.

America’s miraculous boom in fossil fuel should prove a blessing, creating new jobs and economic growth across a number of industrial sectors that benefit from lower energy costs, offering a chance to reduce defense spending and move those savings into investments in human capital and domestic infrastructure. More important, it can provide a critical breathing space while the nation uses the revenue windfall from this perhaps last domestic oil boom to invest in the transition to renewable energy production. Of course, this boom could just as easily prove just another opportunity for short-term profit for a few, a transfer of risk to the many and oil-intoxicated indolence on climate change.



# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

### Sexual Slavery: A Not-So-Super Side of the Super Bowl

**S**uper Bowl Sunday will draw thousands of football fans to New Orleans to root for the 49ers or the Ravens or just to enjoy the spectacle. But the Super Bowl will also attract a less acknowledged population to the city: victims of human trafficking forced into prostitution.

Globally there are between 100,000 and 250,000 children who are victims of sex trafficking, said Laura J. Lederer, president and founder of the Washington-based Global Centurion Foundation, an advocacy group that seeks to target trafficking by focusing on demand. The perception that the practice of selling girls for sex is restricted to Asia, Eastern Europe or Africa belies the overwhelming problem in the United States, which each year is exacerbated by a spike in organized sex trafficking at major sporting events such as the Super Bowl, said Lederer.

“We want to help people understand that this is a problem here in the United States,” Lederer said. “We have a homegrown sex trafficking problem.” Lederer was speaking at a workshop hosted by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

Trafficking girls for sex is such a major concern that the U.S. Attorney’s Office in New Orleans has established a Human Trafficking Joint Task Force that, in advance of Super Bowl XLVII on Feb. 3, has been meeting with city, state and federal law enforcement authorities, faith-based groups and nongovernmental organizations to develop a collaborative approach to combat the problem.

Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond of New Orleans, Tom Benson, owner of the Saints, and his wife, Gayle, and other city officials are scheduled to air a public service announcement before the Super Bowl to raise awareness and ask people to remain vigilant if they suspect sex trafficking. “Human trafficking, modern-day slavery...is a powerful evil,” Archbishop Aymond says in the announcement. The ad will highlight a toll-free hotline number—(888) 373-7888—that is staffed 24 hours a day by the Polaris Project of the National Human Trafficking Resource Center.

Exact numbers are difficult to come by, but experts estimate that for Super

Bowl XLIV in Miami—ironically, won by the Saints—about 10,000 prostitutes descended on south Florida. Officials also know that the volume of Web site solicitations shoots up during the week of major sporting events.

“Human trafficking is basically a form of slavery,” said John Krentel, a local attorney who is on the board of Eden House, a newly opened safe haven in New Orleans for women seeking to escape prostitution or human trafficking. New Orleans is a major site for trafficking in the United States, Krentel said. “New Orleans is also a port city, and there are a lot of people coming through. But I want to emphasize, these are American citizens we are talking about—not foreign nationals.”

Lederer said her nonprofit group targets the patrons of prostitution, because if the law went after prosti-



tutes only, there would “always be more victims to replace them....What’s missing is the demand side, the men who drive the market,” Lederer added.

“We need to reach young men and boys—the new generation—and help them understand that human beings should never be bought and sold,” she said. “We’re trying to reach people from a values-based, faith-based and human rights-based approach about the sacredness, worth and dignity of every human being.”

## EUROPE

### ‘Life Windows’ Controversy

**O**n a damp street in Warsaw, not far from St. Florian’s Cathedral, a tiny mattress lies on display behind a safety-glass window, installed at waist height on a dull



**TRAFFICK COPS:** A Homeland Security investigator stands with two trafficking victims freed during a raid on Jan. 17.

PHOTO: DEFENSE VIDEO & IMAGERY DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

gray wall. When the Polish capital's first "life window" was dedicated in 2006, it was one of dozens newly installed around Europe as a safe place for unwilling mothers to leave their babies. Today controversy is growing, as an influential U.N. committee charges that the windows violate children's rights.

"We're not encouraging mothers to get rid of their children," Agnieszka Homan, spokeswoman for the Polish church's Caritas charity, said. "These life windows offer a facility where women who don't want to give birth in [a] hospital can leave them anonymously, without endangering [babies'] lives."

Historians believe Europe's first baby hatch, life window or foundling

wheel was opened in Rome under Pope Innocent III in 1198. Most hatches were closed in the 19th century, as state social care expanded; but they began to reopen at the end of the 20th century, as more babies were abandoned amid economic hardship and social breakdown.

Most now consist of heated incubators with simple sign-directions, which trigger a bell or buzzer when a baby is deposited inside. In Krakow, Poland, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth opened a life window in 2006. When a baby was left there last fall, a card was found: "Casper, I'm sorry. I love you very much—Mum."

"We were woken by the alarm at night and ran down, and we saw a beautiful boy lying in the window," Sister Jozefina told the Catholic weekly *Gość Niedzielny*.

"The card really touched us, since we sensed the mother must have really struggled.... We wonder what made her give up her own child, and we're supporting such women with our prayers."

While abandoning children is illegal in Britain and other countries, 11 of the European Union's 27 member-states now allow hatches. Germany

has about 80 baby hatches, and Austria has 15. In Switzerland, 87 percent of citizens said they were "very useful or useful" in a 2011 survey, while more than a quarter thought every hospital should have one.

That helps explain the strong reactions when the U.N.'s Committee on the Rights of the Child, based in Geneva, called in 2012 for the closing of baby hatches in Europe. A Hungarian committee member, Maria Herczog, denounced the "medieval" hatches as a violation of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by every major country except the United States. She said the hatches contradicted Articles 7 and 8 of the convention, which enshrine a child's rights to "to know and be cared for by his or her parents" and "to preserve his or her identity" and encouraged women to abandon their babies after giving birth in "insecure situations."

"Adopted children will one day want to know about their roots, but this is impossible with the life windows," Monika Redziak, director of Poland's Catholic Care and Upbringing Centre, said.

Homan, the Caritas spokeswoman, thinks the objections are all a misunderstanding. She points out the same U.N. convention's Article 6 enshrines a child's "inherent right to life," and this has to take priority. Supporters say the life windows are saving newborns. Polish church representatives say they're counting on the Vatican, which is represented at the U.N., to resist attempts to close the hatches.



**CLOSE THE DOOR?** Some child advocates seek to shut down "baby hatches."

## Redemptorist Regrets

The head of the Redemptorist fathers in Rome said he deeply regrets the actions of an Irish member of the order who accused the Vatican of subjecting him to “frightening procedures reminiscent of the Inquisition.” Michael Brehl, the Redemptorist order’s superior general, confirmed that Father Tony Flannery is under Vatican investigation for alleged ambiguities “regarding fundamental areas of Catholic doctrine.” In Dublin Father Flannery said on Jan. 20 that he was “threatened with excommunication from the Catholic Church for suggesting that, in the future, women might become priests and calling for this and other matters to be open for discussion.” An investigation of Father Flannery—a founding member of Ireland’s Association of Catholic Priests—was reportedly triggered by an article in a religious magazine in 2010. In the article, Father Flannery wrote that he no longer believed that “the priesthood as we currently have it in the church originated with Jesus” or that Jesus designated “a special group of his followers as priests.” He has declined to repudiate this and other positions.

## New School Model

Visiting a Catholic grade school in Philadelphia on Jan. 18, Pennsylvania’s Gov. Tom Corbett lauded a new educational model for Catholic schools in the city. Independence Mission Schools is a management organization for 16 independent Catholic elementary schools located in mostly poor city neighborhoods. The organization was founded two years ago when St. Martin de Porres parish school was struggling to serve the children of its gritty North Philadelphia community. Removing management of the school from the parish, the group brought together

## NEWS BRIEFS

In a recently released letter sent last Advent, Archbishop J. Augustine Di Noia, vice president of the Pontifical Commission “Ecclesia Dei,” advised members of the Society of St. Pius X “to **abandon the harsh and counterproductive rhetoric** that has emerged over the past years.” • The church has never encouraged the **use of ivory** for devotional objects, Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi, S.J., wrote on Jan. 22, responding to questions posed in an National Geographic editorial about the illicit ivory trade. • Following the gang rape and death of a paramedical student, the Catholic bishops’ conference of India called for “comprehensive laws and effective measures to **ensure the security and safety of women**” in a statement released on Jan. 23. • A coalition of African civil societies appealed to the African Union to **stop the war** in Sudan’s South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, noting in a statement on Jan. 25 the suffering of more than 700,000 displaced civilians. • With tensions rising on the Korean peninsula, the Catholic Church **calls for a “change of course”** and the start of a “new era of cooperation,” said the Rev. John Bosco Byeon, national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in South Korea, on Jan. 25.



**Poached ivory**

financial support from business leaders plus expertise in school governance and accountability. “Today it is financially stable with rising academic standards,” said Brian McElwee, the chief executive officer. The successful model was scaled up and expanded to include 16 schools, mostly in response to the announced closures of dozens of Catholic parish schools early last year.

## Pope: ‘Use Media Well’

Social media need to promote more logic, kindness and Christian witness than bluster, star-status and division, Pope Benedict XVI said in his message for World Communications Day, to be observed on May 12. The statement was released on Jan. 24, the feast of St. Francis de Sales, patron of journalists. Given that the digital world exposes

people to a wider range of opinions and beliefs, people need to accept the existence of other cultures, be enriched by them and offer others what “they possess that is good, true and beautiful,” the pope said. Christians are called to bring truth and values to the whole world—online and off—remembering that it is ultimately the power of God’s word that touches hearts, not sheer human effort, he said. Social media “need the commitment of all who are conscious of the value of dialogue, reasoned debate and logical argumentation.” Social forums need to be used wisely and well, which means fostering balanced and respectful dialogue and debate, he said, and paying special attention to “privacy, responsibility and truthfulness.”

From CNS and other sources.



# Jesus, by the Book

**W**hat's the most useful thing I could tell an **America** reader today? Beyond the expected spiritual advice about following Christ, loving others, going to Mass, reading Scripture, praying regularly and helping the poor, try this: Read Gerhard Lohfink.

Among the dozens of press releases we receive at **America** every day are notices from Catholic publishers. One day an e-mail from Liturgical Press caught my eye just as I was about to hit "Delete." The notice was for a forthcoming book called *Jesus of Nazareth: Who He Was, What He Wanted*. Currently I'm writing my own book on Jesus, so anything in that area of scholarship is of special interest. Plus, I'm a member of a Society named after the man.

But the blurb clinched a read. From Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., professor of New Testament at Boston College, and a man who as editor of *New Testament Abstracts* has forgotten more about the Gospels than I'll ever know, came this: "Lohfink's *Jesus of Nazareth* is the best Jesus book I know." I blinked twice before believing it. Then I exercised my prerogative as an editor at large and requested a copy. So far, I've read the German Scripture scholar's book three times.

What makes Father Lohfink's book so richly satisfying is its seamless attention to both the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith." In case you've been living under a theological rock for the last few years, you'll know that there is a lively debate about whether

Catholic writers should focus on one or the other, categories that loosely correspond to Jesus' two natures (human and divine).

In historical Jesus studies, scholars try to explain as much as we can know about the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth. Books on the historical Jesus might describe, for example, religious customs in first-century Jewish culture in Palestine, the socioeconomic realities of living under Roman rule or the ways that extended families sustained themselves in small villages in Galilee. All this can help us understand the context in which Jesus carried out his ministry and appreciate Jesus' humanity. By contrast, books that focus more on the "Christ of faith" might consider topics like the Resurrection, how Christ saves us, the nature of his relationship to the Father and the Holy Spirit and so on. As such, they help us ponder the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Frankly, I've never seen much of a conflict between the two approaches. The challenge is not to focus overly on Jesus' humanity or his divinity—so that neither is overlooked. But to understand Jesus' life, death and resurrection as fully as possible, one needs to know about the historical Jesus and one also needs to believe in the Christ of faith.

Father Lohfink's book is—if you'll pardon the expression—a revelation. It is one of the rare works that considers equally both natures. So while he elegantly describes the historical milieu in which Jesus lived, he does not

neglect the wonderful miracles, the "signs" that his disciples and followers found so astonishing. Lohfink is equally at home talking about the socioeconomic conditions in which the parable of the unjust steward would be heard as he is about the healing of the man with the withered hand.

Father Lohfink has also written a line I've been waiting years to read in a scholarly work. In his chapter on

Easter, he responds to the common tendency to set aside the supernatural, the miraculous or the inexplicable in the Gospels. How often have you heard, for example, that the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes was simply an example of sharing? Or that the resurrection was simply a

"shared experience" of the disciples' remembering Jesus?

Lohfink has little sympathy for this: "It is a way of currying favor with the Enlightenment mentality, which wants to explain away everything unusual." That no one has stilled storms before or since is not an argument against the authenticity of the Gospels so much as an example of Jesus as someone who was, as Lohfink says, "irritatingly unique and therefore can surpass all previous experience."

To believe in the risen Christ you need to know something about the man who walked in Palestine. And to understand what the carpenter from Nazareth was doing you need to believe he is the Son of God. To come to know Jesus of Nazareth, try *Jesus of Nazareth*.

One needs to know about the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.

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JAMES MARTIN, S.J., is editor at large of *America*. His e-book, *Together on Retreat: Meeting Jesus in Prayer*, has just been released by HarperOne.



"The Church needs you,  
relies on you and continues  
to turn to you with trust,  
particularly to reach those  
physical and spiritual places  
which others do not reach  
or have difficulty in reaching."

*Pope Benedict XVI to the  
35th General Congregation  
of the Society of Jesus*

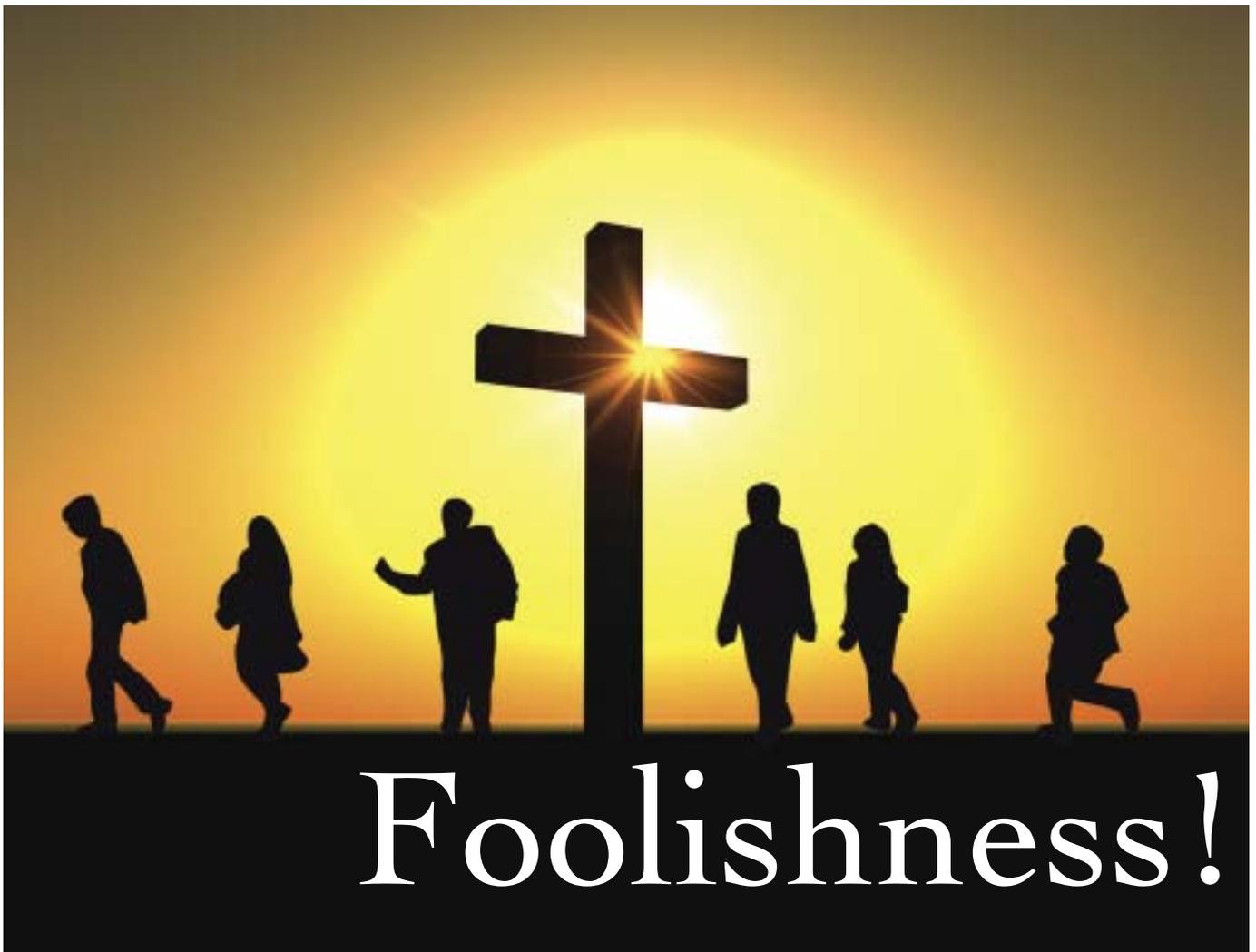


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# Foolishness!

Nonbelievers challenge Christians to take faith seriously.

BY STEPHEN BULLIVANT

**P**salms 14 and 53 both open with the statement: “Fools say in their hearts, ‘There is no God.’” Whatever this may tell us about unbelief in ancient Hebrew society, today it is not only, or predominantly, fools who are saying this. And they do not restrict their utterances to their hearts alone.

Especially in the United States and Europe—the historic heart of “Christendom”—there are large (and growing) numbers of intelligent, educated, reasonable people who reject Christianity and the God it proclaims. Many of these find Christian belief to be literally incredible—not just false, but ridiculously and grotesquely so. Some of these are high-profile public figures: scientists, philosophers, journalists, novelists, politicians, bloggers and stand-up comedians. But most of them are just normal folks. They are our colleagues, friends, relatives, perhaps even, at least sometimes, a

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little bit of ourselves. Crucially, we ought not to forget that, particularly in the United States, these non-fools have likely been (and will ever remain) sealed by baptism; the Catholics among them will have been catechized, confirmed and given first Communion as “true witnesses of Christ,” as the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” describes them.

These hard facts, especially when combined with rising levels of those “non-affiliated” with religion (most of whom are not, or at least not yet, actual atheists), present the church with even harder questions. For the most part, despite the Second Vatican Council’s prescient observation in the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” that “atheism may be numbered among the most serious matters of our time and merits more careful attention”—they are questions we have scarcely begun to formulate, let alone answer. Doing so, it need hardly be said, is one of the most urgent tasks facing “the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed,” as Blessed John Paul II put it in his encyclical “Mission of the Redeemer.”

Of course, there are myriad reasons (philosophical, psychological, social, cultural, moral) why a person might be or become skeptical toward the truth-claims of Christianity. Here I focus on just one. Somewhat perversely, this is a fundamental feature of the Christian message, yet one that atheists often grasp more intuitively than we do. Basically, the non-fools have realized something essential that we ourselves have been trying to forget.

### **Monstrous Claims**

Let’s face it: The God of Christianity is an extraordinarily odd kind of being (if one can call God a kind of “being” at all). And the followers of this God subscribe to—or say they do—a list of quite ludicrous-seeming claims.

It is one thing to affirm a God who is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving, who created and sustains “all things visible and invisible.” That is in itself a fairly striking and radical claim—in its time, one that was revolutionary in human history and that the infant Christianity imbibed at the breast of Judaism. Yet it is quite another thing to claim that this God—or worse, one of three persons of this one God—took flesh, resulting in someone both fully God and fully human.

Consider, for example, Christianity’s most instantly recognizable (and thereby most easily ignorable) symbols: the baby Jesus and the crucifix. The first proclaims that this God-man spent a significant amount of time doing things like suffering from colic and cradle cap, screaming in the night for no discernible reason and weeing incontinently over his sleep-deprived (human) parents. Tears, tantrums and teething are thus the works of the one true God, just as surely as are “the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them” (Acts 4:24). The second affirms that the God-man was tortured and murdered, subjected not even to some grandiosely superlative mode of suffering and death, as might befit a king, but to the tawdrily mundane form of execution to which the Roman Empire treated countless slaves, pirates and enemies of the state (a fact that in itself raises an interesting question about the kind of God we are dealing with).

It is perhaps fair to say that most believers do not quite realize the outrageous character of

these most basic and taken-for-granted hallmarks of Christianity. (Is there not something at least a little strange about hanging around one’s neck a miniature corpse nailed to a tiny cross?) Irrespective of whether they are true or not, these are surely among the wildest and most monstrous claims ever proposed in human history. And if they are true, then they are, or ought to be, the most profound and world-inverting facts about life and the universe. Yet somehow, in the course of nearly 2,000 years, these claims have become so familiar, so tamed and domesticated, as to seem hardly worthy of comment, let alone wonder or puzzlement, among the great majority of those who profess them.

### **Foolishness to the Gentiles**

Such was not, however, the case for those to whom the good news of Jesus Christ was first proposed. As Paul famously put it: “We proclaim Christ and him crucified, a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23). For the Jews, of course, the claim that the Messiah, whether God himself or not, had come but had been crucified was blasphemously scandalous (*skandalon* being the Greek word for “stumbling-block”). And they were, it should be said, impeccably non-foolish in thinking so: No one was expecting a crucified-and-raised Messiah (hence, for example, Peter’s “satanic” rebuke to

**It is perhaps fair to say that most believers do not quite realize the outrageous character of these most basic and taken-for-granted hallmarks of Christianity.**

Jesus in Matthew 16 and the disappointment of those trudging along the road to Emmaus concerning him whom they “had hoped...would be the one to redeem Israel” in Luke 24).

For the gentiles, meanwhile, the entire proclamation was manifest folly. The very idea that the king of the Jews—indeed, of the whole world—would hail not merely from a backwater of the Empire (Judea), but from a backwater of that backwater (Galilee), would arrive on donkeyback leading a motley assemblage of peasants and fishermen and would be arrested and crucified as a common criminal before miraculously coming back to life a few days later as the savior of the universe—surely these were the ravings, as the pagan philosopher Celsus put it, of “women, slaves and little children.”

But for those who have been brought up with this narrative and with the idea of a God who was truly a human being—however imperfectly or infrequently expressed or reflected upon—it is very hard indeed to be genuinely confronted with the Christian proclamation in all of its (apparently) scandalous foolishness. Whether one believes it all or not, it is very easy to nod along half-heartedly (a diaper-clad creator? Fine; a god who gets murdered? Sure; a carpenter who saves the universe? Whatever) as though these are the most boringly obvious facts one has ever heard. And it has to be said that all too often Christian preaching and apologetics simply reinforce this view.

By presenting “Christ and him crucified” as something platitudinous and uncontroversial—something to which all right-minded, non-obtuse people should naturally and non-problematically assent—we risk conditioning not just others, but ourselves, against ever taking this outlandish proposition truly seriously. It is an unusual person who would turn his or her life around for the sake of something platitudinous or commonsensical. And yet it is precisely such a turnaround (*metanoia*), or repentance, that Jesus thinks is required in order to “believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15).

In *The Crucified God*, Jürgen Moltmann remarks that the true import of Good Friday “is often better recognized by non-Christians and atheists than by religious Christians, because it astonishes and offends them. They see the profane horror and godlessness of the Cross because they do not believe the religious interpretations which have given a meaning to the senselessness of this death.” In this light, consider these remarks, taken from two of the “new atheists,” that no doubt reflect the views of a wider group of non-fools.

Richard Dawkins writes in *The God Delusion*: “I have described the atonement...as vicious, sado-masochistic and repellent. We should also dismiss it as barking mad, but for its ubiquitous familiarity which has dulled our



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objectivity.” And Sam Harris, in *Letter to a Christian Nation*, writes, “Christianity amounts to the claim that we must love and be loved by a God who approves of the scapegoating, torture, and murder of one man—his son, incidentally—in compensation for the misbehavior and thought-crimes of all others.”

Now, as fair descriptions of the theology of the cross, these statements leave much to be desired. But as impressionist reflections on the kind of thing that the crucifixion is—a monstrous affront to, and interruption of, the normal workings of the world (“God’s foolishness,” as Paul puts it)—they are arguably onto something vital to which Christians have inured themselves. While wonderment and incredulity are not quite the same thing, an unbeliever may yet hear strains overlooked by those with ears grown “dull of hearing” (Mt 13:15).

### Re-encountering the Gospel

Dawkins is correct that the problem lies with “ubiquitous familiarity”—not because it undermines our objectivity but rather because it limits our capacity to be shocked and astonished, and thus excited, challenged. It is one thing to believe that Christianity is true. It is quite another to feel amazement that it not only is true, but even could be so, and to (re)build one’s life around it. Our evangelizing and

catechetical efforts, however, seem to focus on convincing people only of the former. Perhaps that is one reason why so many Catholics, having been raised and educated in the faith, are so easily able to drift away from it (often without really noticing they are doing so).

But for the growing number of people brought up outside of Christianity, or who have already drifted sufficiently far from it, the possibilities of encountering the Gospel in all its mind-bending splendor are more promising. A context in which the good news can be received as scandalous foolery is—as the early church amply demonstrates—equally one in which it can be greeted with surprise as “all that is good and right and true” (Eph 5:9).

Viewed in this light, Scripture’s cryptic preference for being hot or cold, as opposed to lukewarm, makes much more sense (Rv 3:15-16).

Naturally, in emphasizing the radical, paradoxical nature of the Christian proclamation, there is a danger of retreating into fideistic obscurity. This, too, is gravely to be avoided: Augustine and Aquinas both caution against (unnecessarily) giving rise to *irrisio infidelium*, or “the mockery of unbelievers.” My point is not that Christianity is actually foolish, or false or ridiculous—on the contrary! But rather that, like so many profoundly true things, it should probably strike us as such on a first and cursory hearing. Compare, for example, the wonders of the universe revealed to us by modern physics: that everything in the universe was once packed into an infinitesimally small space; that the vast majority of a solid object is actually empty space; that there are perhaps a hundred billion galaxies in the universe, each with maybe a hundred billion solar systems and so forth. Popular science writers are adept at carefully explaining how and why all these things are true and the solid reasons we have for believing them. But they also revel in the scandalously foolish appearance of these claims, knowing full well that this is what excites and entralls their readers.

The church fathers, of course, were no strangers to such strategies—and would-be new evangelizers might do well to take note. The second-century apologist St. Melito of Sardis speaks of Christ as “treading upon the earth, yet filling heaven...standing before Pilate, and at the same time sitting with his Father; he was nailed upon the tree, and yet was the Lord of all things.” And as Augustine famously wrote in one of his Christmas homilies: “The maker of man was made man, that the ruler of the stars might suck at the breast; the fountain, thirst...strength, be made weak; health, be wounded; life, die.”

“A stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the gentiles” this may be, but better that than a platitude to the “non-affiliated” and boredom to the baptized. **A**

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# The Age of Skepticism

The challenge of relevance in a quickly changing culture

BY THOMAS J. BUSHLACK

**E**ver since I first visited St. Peter's Square as an undergraduate, I have been struck by the architectural image of the two open "arms" reaching from the basilica, welcoming the pilgrim people of the entire world into the church. Yet if we pay attention to the data and to anecdotal evidence, for every one person walking into that embrace there are roughly four walking out the back door.

With this cultural background in mind, Pope Benedict XVI called the Synod of Bishops together to discuss the topic, "the new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith." In addition, he has announced a "Year of Faith." The October gathering was attended by the bishops of the synod, who were joined by 45 experts and 49 observers, including 10 female experts and 19 female observers, the largest contingent of female ever invited to such an event.

Much of the diagnosis provided by the bishops regarding the challenge to faith and to the church in the late modern world is accurate. There is widespread skepticism about the

possibility of knowing the truth in our world today. The sociologist James Davison Hunter calls this phenomena "dissolution"—an intellectual and linguistic breakdown of the trust that words accurately convey meaning or express anything as objectively true. This dissolution manifests itself in both intellectual and popular culture. I see it every day in my students, even if they cannot articulate what it is that makes it so difficult for them to take their required theology classes seriously as an academic pursuit.

Ever since I read Ralph McInerny's biography of Jacques Maritain, I have been struck by the example of Jacques and his wife, Raïssa Maritain, who, struggling with questions of the possibility of knowing the truth, made a pledge that if they discovered that they could not access truth, they would commit suicide. This was a dramatic response to cultural dissolution, to be sure, but also a poignant example of the need for some sense of truth to make life meaningful, rich and worth living. Many in our culture today would not take the Maritains' pledge so seriously; but perhaps it is true, as Henry David Thoreau put it, that most people are living lives of quiet desperation. It may not manifest itself in a pact to commit suicide, but many people today are living without a sense of meaning or purpose. I cannot help but think of

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Jesus' words: "When he saw the crowds, he was moved with pity for them, because they were...like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36). Given the challenges that face us, how are we to proceed with the engagement with culture to which the Gospel and common sense call us as people of faith?

## A Modern Disease

Perhaps no one has diagnosed this modern struggle better than the German philosopher and Thomist, Josef Pieper. Writing in the wake of World War II and drawing on a term with ancient resonances in the monastic tradition, he called this spiritual disease the modern manifestation of *acedia*. For Pieper, *acedia* is a "deep-seated lack of calm," rooted in a person's refusal "to give the consent of his will to his own being," especially as that being is made in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:26). The human person can only find its true rest in contemplation of and relationship with the divine beauty and goodness. Although *acedia* can manifest itself as a depressive state (hence it is sometimes inaccurately translated as "sloth" or "laziness"), more frequently in today's world it manifests itself in excessive busyness—the pursuit of activity, success, achievement, possessiveness—anything to justify my existence in the face of apparent meaninglessness and to keep me distracted from the creeping sense of despair that underlies day to day existence.

The church is the steward of a vast array of spiritual resources—not least among them the liturgy, the word of God and the Eucharist—that speak directly to the suffering and *acedia* of the human person in the late modern world. The attempt to convey these resources authentically, peacefully and with great love and compassion is literally a matter

of life and death for many and is the central task of the new evangelization. So I offer here a few thoughts and suggestions on the new evangelization from my perspective as a moral theologian working in the American context.

*Disengage from the "culture wars."* In Jesus' time no less than now, people are ultimately persuaded to the truth of the Gospel by the visceral appeal and the raw beauty of the truth that Christ embodies. Political bantering and villainizing those with whom we disagree only fosters alienation, resentment and hatred in our culture. Worse, it divides the members of the body of Christ against each other. I am not sure, but I suspect the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit (Mk 3:29, Mt 12:30) has something to do with fostering this kind of division. In addition, I am not so sure any more that it is our responsibility to "Christianize" modern culture. The Gospel of John tells us: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over" (18:36). The culture wars are a violent fight (even if only verbally), so why are "my followers" taking up arms? (Let me be clear that this does not mean we turn away from public or cultural engagement or the struggle for justice, but that we make sure we are doing this in ways that align with the Gospel).

*Do not compete with pop culture.* The old saying is true: "The medium is the message." For all the benefits of modern technology, its predominant forms of communication foster superficiality and mediocrity at their worst, and even at their best are incapable of fostering the kind of deep contemplation that can address the *acedia* of the age. People today, especially young people, can sniff out insincerity from



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/CAMINOEL

a mile away, and modern media cannot fully capture or convey the most authentic and beautiful expressions of the Catholic tradition.

*Bring forth out of our treasure what is old and what is new* (Mt 13:52). The church historian Jaroslav Pelikan reportedly remarked that it takes approximately 100 years for each ecumenical council to implement the fullness of its vision and genius. If that is true, we are only half way to realizing the fullness of the Second Vatican Council, a process that is still working itself out (see “A Time to Harvest,” by Ladislav Orsy, S.J., *Am.*, 10/8/12). The council’s genius was expressed in the French term *ressourcement*. The ideal was to go back to the sources, to Scripture and the vast wisdom of the early and medieval church, in order to speak the truth of Christ’s love to the modern world. The Catholic tradition is beautiful in its expression of the truth that it conveys, and we can witness to the beauty of that tradition in as many ways as there are Catholics in the world.

*Uphold the truth.* The defense of the faith will not appear the same today as in past centuries. It certainly will not look like the kind of reactionism against the modern age that characterized the neoscholasticism of the 19th century. If the presentation of the truth is to appeal to the modern person, it will most likely need to be hermeneutical. That is, the

truth of the Gospel should be presented as containing essential and timeless truths about the triune nature of God, about the human person and about creation in a way that is interpreted and lived in as many ways as there are Christians (living, dead and yet to come). Please note: This is not relativism. The rule of faith and the Nicene-Constantinople Creed remain normative, yet within these boundaries of orthodoxy there are an infinite number of ways to live out the Gospel joyfully with faith and authenticity.

*Model servant leadership.* This applies to every Christian, not just the bishops (although they have a distinctive responsibility in this regard). Christianity can only be respected as a way of truth if public leaders exercise responsibility and power in ways that model Christ’s servant leadership (the

washing of the feet, for example, in John 13). Late modern believers and unbelievers are skeptical toward those who exercise any form of authority, and the only way they will trust the church enough to listen to its message is if they see Christian leaders living noble, even if quiet and unassuming, lives. This applies to everyone, as expressed in the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” as the priesthood of all believers, and it is an essential element of the “universal call to holiness.” Christians can exercise authentic leadership in a wide array of public forums—business, media, education, literature, art, academia, politics and government, as well as official positions within the hierarchical church. This kind of servant leadership requires attention to the contours of one’s individual life, to the roles one inhabits and to the institutions to which one belongs and exercises influence. By mindfully embracing each Christian’s particular roles and manifestations of the call to holiness, we can embody the Gospel in creative and life-giving ways in all aspects of culture.

Mohandas Gandhi referred to his life’s mission and work on behalf of justice as “experiments in truth.” The modern age, with its hermeneutical approach to truth, recognizes that truth can be discovered only through lived experience, and this often involves wrong turns and ventures down dead-end alleys. But if we believe the Holy Spirit is still guiding the church, then, as the singer Emmylou Harris put it, we just might “stumble into grace.” We should have no illusion that everyone in our culture will turn toward the Gospel and the church, but there is a universal hunger for truth and the church has a distinctive role to play in proposing Jesus Christ as “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6) to the hearts and minds of the human community. Despite the fears and uncertainties about the future of the church and late modern culture, the open “arms” of St. Peter’s Square continue to challenge us to remain open and hopeful. **A**

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# This Little Light

Strategies for the new evangelization from the Synod of Bishops

BY FRANK DESIANO

**T**he Synod of Bishops brought the church a new perspective and comprehensive strategy for the new evangelization. Even though there were many cautions at the synod about not making evangelization into a program, the overall thrust of the synod discussion pushed toward a very different, and potentially rich, pastoral approach to Catholic life today.

This approach has these major components: the background for pastoral action; the vision of God revealed by Jesus Christ; reception of the vision of Jesus through conversion and personal following; extension of the vision into one's closest daily relationships, notably the family; extension of the vision through involvement in small Christian (base) communities; transformation of the parish through conversion, discipleship and outreach; building partnerships through ecumenical connections and ecclesial movements; and finally, a renewed church.

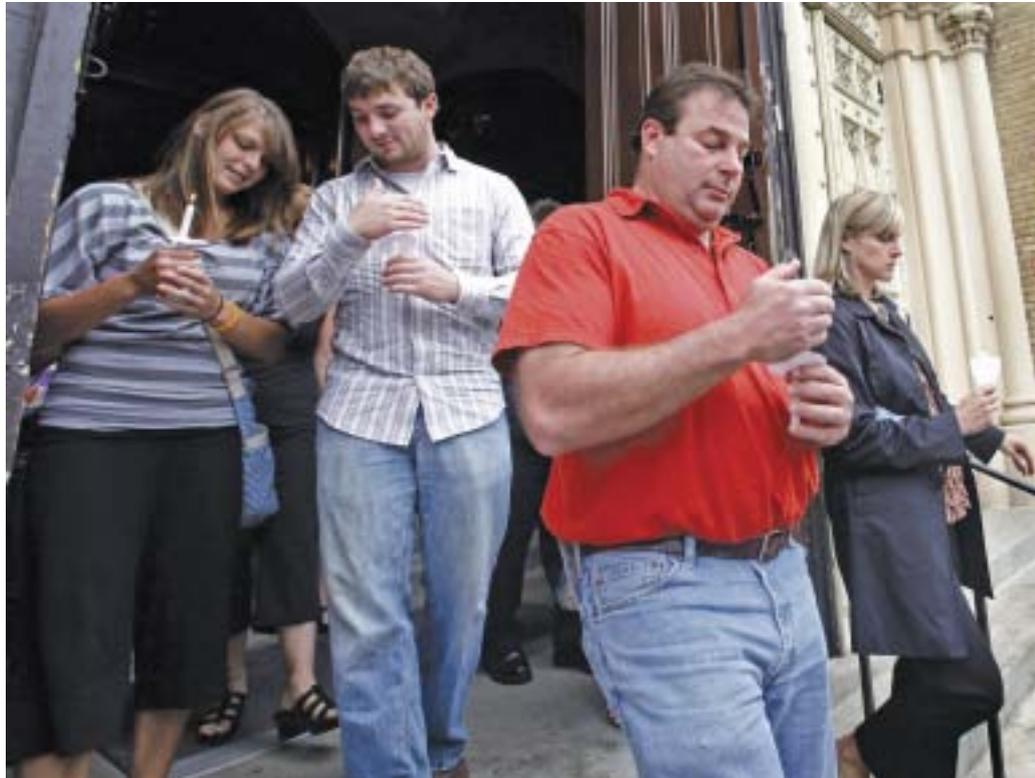
## Rooted in Faith

Undoubtedly the drastic drop in the percentage of people regularly involved in church in the developed world is a main cause for the call for the new evangelization. Many theories might account for the diminishment of Catholic participation and fervor in the developed countries; the chief named culprit, however, is "secularism" with its many attendant "isms"—individualism, relativism and materialism. These qualities identify not only the broader developed world (and increasingly the developing world), but, more frighteningly, the lives of believers themselves. Pope Benedict XVI speaks openly about the "desert" of the modern world in which reference to God has become occluded.

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The new evangelization, accordingly, invites modern people to rediscover God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The heart of the new evangelization is



this renewed personal experience of Jesus Christ in all his dimensions—in the Word, in sacrament, in community and in the poor. The synod often spoke of the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus as a result of his resurrection from the dead, in order to involve us personally in the reality of God.

This all amounts to strategies of conversion—to call Catholics to deeper conversion and to help Catholics know that their lives are filled with experiences of conversion. The ministries of the Word, particularly those of the liturgy and prayer, bring believers into vivid contact with Jesus Christ. Strategies of conversion help Catholics see the forgiveness, healing, renewal and unconditional love that are part of their lived experience. This conversion happens through the Catholic experience of the Mass, other sacraments and daily prayer.

PHOTO: CNS PHOTO/KAREN CALLAWAY, CATHOLIC NEW WORLD

Catholics receive the renewed vision through their experience of Catholic life. The Word of God opens the vision; the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, deepens the vision of conversion in the Catholic heart. This calls for an attitude toward worship quite different from the routine of “getting the Mass done” in 45 or 50 minutes.

Often the synod participants spoke of the need for conversion on the part of bishops and clergy. This assertion might shock those outside and within the church—how can the church’s own leaders not understand the kernel of their own faith experience? One synod participant spoke of how clergy can too easily become more like functionaries than missionaries—centered on the external needs of organization rather than the personal need of relationship with God.

Many synod fathers spoke of the need to focus on lay people, both in professional roles as catechists and in their ordinary lives, as witnesses to Christ. The new evangelization is inconceivable without catechists, lay people who instill the Word of God and elaborate it in church teaching—in personal and powerful ways—in the lives of the faithful. Synod participants saw the catechumenal process (the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) as one of the great gifts of the Second Vatican Council—a process of conversion and growth that should be a prime instance of the formation that happens in all catechetical processes.

This vision has to give rise to a range of spiritual involvements on a personal and parish level, all of which bring Catholics to a surer path of conversion. Local churches and parishes can focus on the renewal experiences, prayer events, moments of adoration and prayer in the Spirit, together with retreats and parish missions that further this sense of conversion. Surely, too, regular daily prayer has to be a part of this experience of ongoing conversion and growing discipleship. It will take years to elaborate the implications of this direction toward conversion.

## Family and Community

Hardly a session of the synod went by without mention of the family. Synod fathers see parents and families as indispensable for the new evangelization. Referring to families as “domestic churches,” participants underlined the importance of the lived experience of faith and conversion in the family as a key element in the transmission of faith.

Certainly, references to popular piety belong here. These are the spontaneous and deep devotions that often define a Catholic culture and the families within that culture, including Marian devotions, devotions to the saints and the Rosary.

While many participants acknowledged difficulties—competing pressures that stultify a sense of unity within families, broken homes, non-nuclear family clusters, as well as the need to personally accompany those who have suffered from divorce or separation—they also argued that these are hardly an argument against shared faith in the home; indeed, they urge it more.

Many bishops from developing nations insisted that small Christian communities (also called “base communities”) have become essential in the growth

and maintenance of faith. They spoke of the way Catholics help reinforce the faith of others, become part of a larger support system and bring the experience of conversion into their relationships with neighbors. Parishes in developed countries might well ponder the gain that can accrue from such communities of faith.

In terms of organizing a congregation, small groups can accomplish what parishes, with their sometimes large and anonymous styles, often cannot—putting a personal face on the experience of Catholic life. Further, they can be the first points of outreach beyond the faithful, calling the ever-growing numbers of uninvolved people into some kind of faith relationship. If it is difficult for someone to make it to a parish church, it certainly is much easier for them to make it to a neighbor’s house or apartment.

These small groups, breaking open the word of God in more consistent and extended ways every time they meet, help believers experience the power of the word through reflection, discussion, personal sharing and common prayer. Making *lectio divina* a part of small group sharing can be a way to link Catholics to experiences of contemplation and adoration, as the Word leads them to fuller awareness and acceptance of God’s action in their lives.

## Transforming the Parish

Nearly every session at the synod referred to the parish as a central nucleus in Catholic life and renewal. Certainly, many commentators remark on the unique role that the parish has played in American life, being a force for community unity and organizing for generations of immi-

# The new evangelization is inconceivable without lay people who instill the Word of God in the lives of the faithful.

grants. But participants from every continent spoke of the parish's central place in evangelization. If the Second Vatican Council underlined the importance and power of liturgy for Catholic life, it also thereby affirmed the centrality of the parish, where the Eucharist is celebrated in an open and regular way for a community of the faithful. Synod fathers urged the devout and expressive celebration of the Eucharist as a key value in the Catholic experience. They spoke about welcome and inclusion as part of one's experience of the parish. Looking at Catholic life in relational terms, Catholics could see the parish as the main gathering community for the smaller communities of faith (families and small groups) that are part of the new evangelization.

Parishes should also embrace charity, the dramatic way in which the new evangelization receives its most compelling witness. If the Trinity is the experience of God's superabundant love, then the Trinity guides us to reveal that love to all humankind. Synod fathers pointed to the works of Mother Theresa and other initiatives to feed the hungry and care for people in need as examples of how the reality of faith is revealed through charity. Jesus coupled his preaching with "miracles"—deeds of wonder that showed God's liberating power and forgiveness to all, particularly

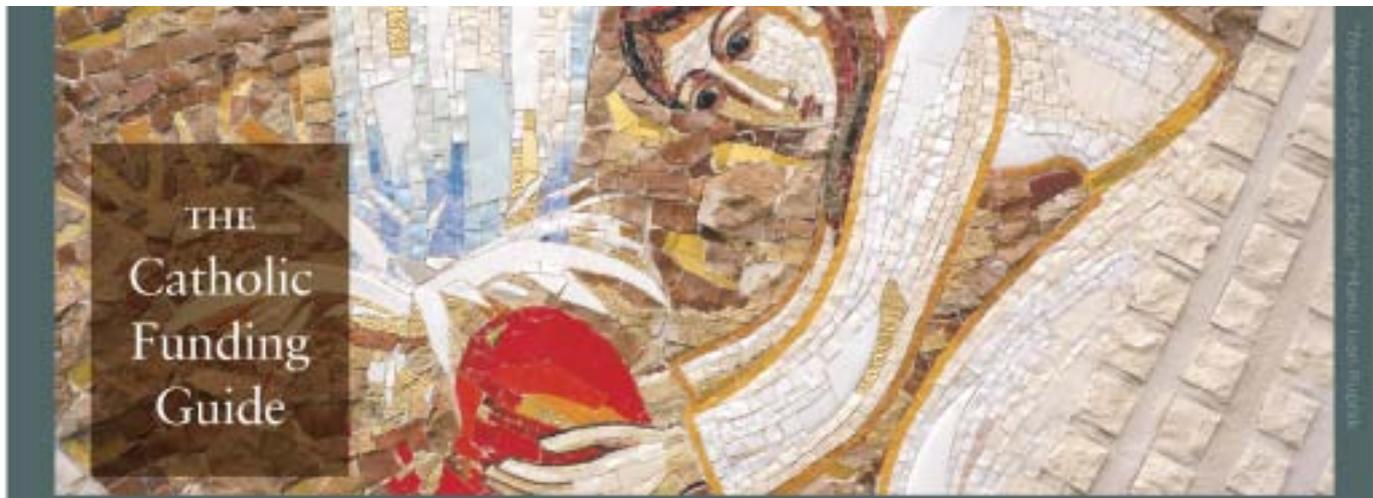
those without much esteem in society.

The synod spoke often of the need to reach out to those who have no faith or who have become "tired" in their faith. Much of this work falls to parishes and other movements connected to parishes. No document received more attention than "On Evangelization in the Modern World," an apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI, which spoke of evangelization as the essential mission of the church, the reason for its existence. While the new evangelization focuses particularly on those peoples who have already received the faith (rather than those who have not explicitly heard the Gospel), it recognizes that hard-and-fast categories cannot be laid down in a world as mobile as ours, a world where people shift their allegiances so often.

How parishes embody outreach beyond their members remains the major challenge for them. Parishes have some images to fall back on when they think of liturgy and catechesis (much as these images need to be infused with new life); few of them, however, have institutional images of reaching out beyond their own membership to those who have ceased practicing their faith or who might be ready to accept an invitation.

The synod did not see parishes and dioceses as working in isolation when it comes to the new evangelization. The

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prevailing notion of the synod was that, in effect, “we are all in this together”; there is no need for independent movements and parishes.

### Broadening the Vision

In addition, the synod was quite open to ecumenical and interfaith dimensions of the new evangelization. Many Protestant representatives attended the synod, universally speaking with joy and support about the move of the Catholic Church toward the new evangelization. Archbishop Rowan Williams, head of the Anglican Communion at the time, delivered one of the major addresses to the synod. He spoke about the importance of helping people relate to God through Jesus in the practice of contemplation.

Interreligious dialogue focused to a large extent on Islam and the need to share common beliefs and concerns and to grow in understanding of each other. Bishops from countries with large Muslim populations frequently noted the difficulty of being a Christian church in a society where conversion to Christianity is often a crime and inviting people to conversion can mean imprisonment.

Similarly, bishops from Asian countries reflected on the unique place of Christianity in the midst of religions that flourished long before the coming of Jesus Christ, the joint values that Catholics shared with these ancient faiths and the essential dialogical posture that Catholics must have when

interacting with other believers.

The notion that the new evangelization began with the Second Vatican Council could be heard at various times during the synod. The grounding of the council’s work in its four major constitutions—on liturgy, the church, revelation and the church in the modern world—provided an initial blueprint by which the church could express itself anew, in accord with its deepest tradition, to the modern world. The call to live faith boldly, while dialoguing with modern culture and all believers, hearkened back to the confidence that Pope John XXIII engendered when he asked that the ancient windows of the Catholic Church be opened up to let in more air.

The synod, then, looks for a renewed Catholic people, this time engaged in faith through their own experience, not just recipients of faith through a Catholic culture. The experience primarily turns on Jesus and the community of faith he began. As Catholics live in the world, they bring to that world the power of these relationships of faith, sharing them freely within their families and inviting others to participate in the joy of faith in Jesus Christ.

Should these goals and directions take root, the primary vision of the Catholic faith, the people of God who have encountered their savior in Jesus, can transform not only the billion plus who identify as Catholic, but, as importantly, many beyond the community of faith. **A**

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# Coming Home

The liberation I found at L'Arche

BY CAROLINE MCGRAW

I remember exactly where I was standing. It was in a small hallway at a L'Arche home in Washington, D.C., when I met my friend and housemate Pedro. At the time, I was visiting L'Arche for a series of interviews. I had not yet received an official job offer, but even so, I knew that I would be coming to live and work there. I could feel it in my bones; this was where I needed to be. And amid this sense of assurance, a white-haired man walked up to me.

He leaned in toward my face, speaking loudly and emphatically in Spanish. Suddenly, I wasn't so sure about coming to live in the community. The man before me raised his arms and gestured emphatically, but I hadn't the faintest idea what he was saying. The foreign words were incomprehensible, and Pedro's (not his real name) unique pronunciation, proximity and volume disconcerted me. I wondered: How should I respond? Finally my companion translated a few phrases. Pedro was giving me a blessing, welcoming me into his home. I smiled and nodded, grateful for the prayer. Yet I also thought: We're going to be housemates? But I can't understand a thing he says! God, are you sure?

The answer came back, almost before I'd finished the question: Yes.

So I took a deep breath, swallowed

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**CAROLINE MCGRAW** is the author of *I Was a Stranger to Beauty* (*ThinkPiece*), now available as a *Kindle* single. She lives in Alabama with her husband and writes about caring for people with disabilities at [AWishComeClear.com](http://AWishComeClear.com).

my bafflement and moved forward with the visit. And just a few months later, I was dragging my suitcase up the stairs and hugging my mother goodbye. My time as a live-in direct care assistant with L'Arche had begun.

## An Unconventional Household

L'Arche (French for "the ark") is a faith-based, nonprofit organization

life. He invited three men with intellectual disabilities (Raphael, Philippe and Dany) to move from a local institution into his home in the French village of Trosly-Breuil. That first night was particularly challenging for all involved. In fact, Dany was gone the next day. But Raphael and Philippe remained with Vanier, and their unconventional home grew and gave rise to others like it.



CNS PHOTO BY MARTIN LUEDEERS

that creates homes where people with and without intellectual disabilities share life together. L'Arche began not as a crusade to change the world but as a single individual's daring act of kindness and hospitality. L'Arche came into being in 1964 because a man named Jean Vanier, under the spiritual guidance of The Rev. Thomas Philippe, welcomed strangers into his

At present, there are over 150 L'Arche communities worldwide, located in 40 different countries. L'Arche has made a significant contribution to social change and inclusion in the 40-plus years since its inception; Vanier's recent Nobel Peace Prize nomination comes as no surprise to those who know L'Arche. But in 1964, Vanier little dreamed that his

act of obedience would ripple outward in such a profound way. In fact, Vanier's first impression of L'Arche was that it was a failure.

Most accounts of L'Arche's founding mention just two men, Raphael and Philippe (and even those key individuals often go unnamed). Dany's arrival and subsequent swift departure are largely omitted. In a world obsessed with achievement, it seems strange to say that the first L'Arche household lost one fourth of its members overnight. And yet this first "failure" is an important part of the story, vital to understanding L'Arche's "success" today.

Many community members will tell you that their first introduction to a L'Arche community is a study in paradoxes. Coming to community is both illuminating and unsettling, comforting and disorienting. Likewise, my first meeting with Pedro felt like a failure in that I perceived him as a stranger, unknown and unknowable. Yet at the same time, I knew that I was being led to live with

him, to become a part of his family. It was a strange sensation, knowing that this man was a part of my path but not having the faintest idea as to how I might connect with him.

### **My Journey to L'Arche**

Even so, remembering how I came—or shall I say, was brought—to the L'Arche community helped me to persist in forging connections there. L'Arche was an unexpected twist in my life story. Despite the fact that my younger brother, Willie, is on the autism spectrum, I never suspected that I would care for others with special needs after graduating from college. I thought I would be a full-time writer—and now I am—but it turns out that finding a place among those with special needs was a prerequisite to finding my story, finding my voice.

My path to L'Arche became clearer when I learned more about Jesus' life, how he reached out to people with special needs who were outcasts from society. Jesus loved people with all kinds of disabilities, and with that

comes a tremendous secret that we rarely acknowledge: With or without a formal diagnosis, we all need the kind of compassion and care he offered. Another paradox: We all are in need of support, yet we all have something to offer one another. We all have gifts to give. And it is on this subversive truth that L'Arche stands. L'Arche communities seek to be a place where the "least of these" are the first of all.

Of course, doing so takes time and deliberate effort. Putting people with special needs first is not what society teaches. In an era when essential Medicaid funding is cut more and more every year, when many caregivers earn the minimum wage or less, caring for the least of these is not an easy path. Furthermore, many adults with intellectual disabilities move slowly; in order to meet them where they are, we must slow our frantic pace. And it is hard for us to cultivate that kind of loving patience in this age of super-fast everything. Yet it is precisely because it is so hard for us that



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it is so fruitful; we need this change of pace more than we know.

Working in ministry alongside people with special needs requires that we change, and that change is, in the words of Madeleine L'Engle, "both a challenge and a joy." To be sure, there is treasure to be found in the special needs world. My friends at L'Arche have been my greatest teachers in the art of enough and the spirit of sufficiency. They have taught me to stop my flurry of activity, to pause and stare out windows and watch the birds fluttering in the trees, to nurture friendships and breathe deeply.

### Sitting with Pedro

These gentle lessons served me well when it came to building a relationship with Pedro. Since I did not know what to do, I did the same thing Vanier did: I started small. I practiced Spanish with my fluent housemates. I sat with Pedro, letting the rhythmic cadence of his words wash over me (and, hesitantly, I pronounced a few phrases in Spanish in response).

Gradually, the man who seemed like a stranger became a beloved friend. Pedro revealed to me that, as Leo Tolstoy wrote in *Anna Karenina*, "If it is true that there are as many minds as there are heads, then there are as many kinds of love as there are hearts." I came to love Pedro before I could fully comprehend his speech. Why? Because even though I could not understand his words, I grew to understand his heart.

Soon after, an unexpected miracle occurred. I woke up one day and found, to my immense surprise, that I could understand Pedro. It was as though someone had flipped a switch inside my brain; hours and hours of listening had finally paid off. Soon, I took delight in translating Pedro's speeches for visitors. I had despaired of ever feeling connected to Pedro; now, I helped new members to connect with him. I had the privilege of helping others dismantle their barriers, and I never tired of seeing it, that moment when people started understanding Pedro for themselves. I knew

just what it felt like: liberation.

Indeed, that is the work of L'Arche, to break down barriers between people with and without intellectual disabilities. The organization's charter states, "In a divided world, L'Arche wants to be a sign of hope." When people visit L'Arche homes, they are struck by the ways in which the members depend upon one another. Core members (individuals with intellectual disabilities at the center of community life) depend on direct-care assistants for help with personal care tasks like showering and dressing; in turn, assistants depend on core members for invaluable things like friendship, support and mentorship. Yet it is also important to remember that implicit in the statement, "L'Arche wants to be a sign of hope," is what L'Arche does not attempt to be. It does not pretend to be a solution to the problem of providing for all individuals with special needs. Instead, L'Arche seeks to signify a larger reality: God's love and the promise of welcome for the stranger within us all. A



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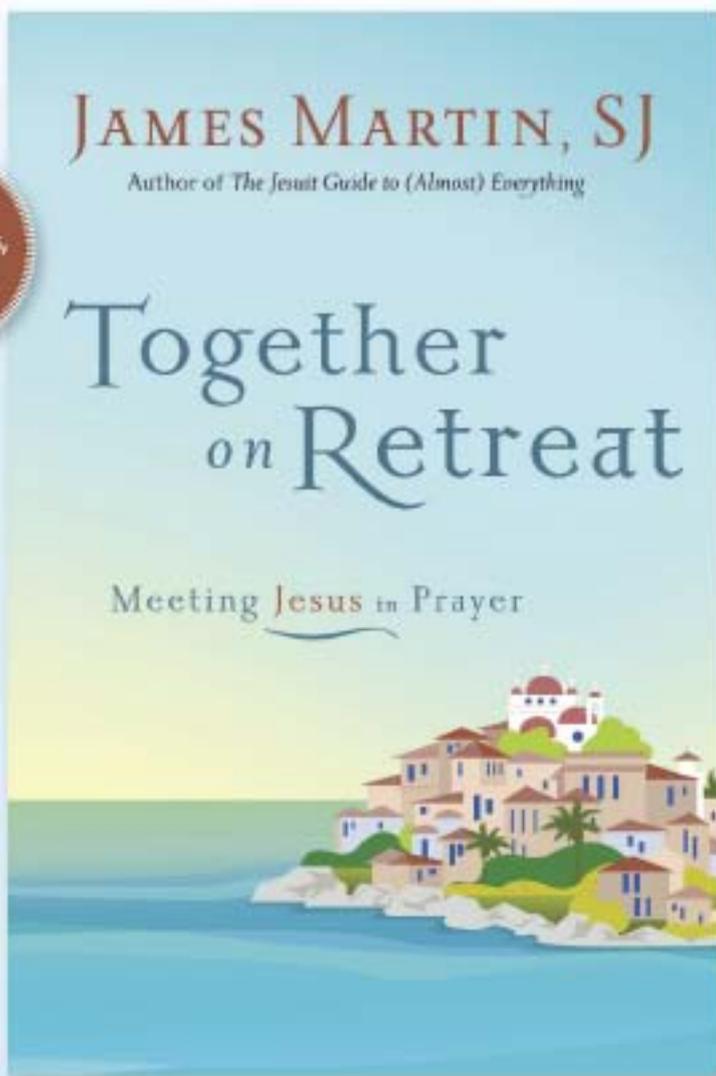
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FILM | JOHN ANDERSON

## THE HUNTED AND THE HAUNTED

*The disturbing brilliance of ‘Zero Dark Thirty’*

Many of the more talked-about movies this season concern themselves with barbarity in one manifestation or another. “Lincoln” is about slavery; “Argo” about imperialism, radical fundamentalism and sociopathic politics. As for “Les Misérables”—where can you even begin? They are very different movies, of course, but they share a common impulse: Regarding the inhuman,

the uncivilized or the cruel, they are pretty much against it.

**Zero Dark Thirty**, the much-discussed thriller about the hunt for Osama bin Laden, takes a slightly different point of view. As many readers already know, the film—directed by the Oscar-winning Kathryn Bigelow (“The Hurt Locker”) and written by her partner/producer Mark Boal—proffers a shall-we-say generous view of the

“enhanced interrogation” techniques so popular with the Bush administration in the understandably hysterical moment following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

It should be said right away that the film is gripping, masterfully executed, engaging, revelatory and enormously entertaining. It also takes the strategically brilliant dramatic tack of steering all the audience’s emotional equity into one character, Maya, an agent for the Central Intelligence Agency, whose single-mindedness would earn the admiration of Al Qaeda. As played by Jessica Chastain, who seems to be everywhere in films these days, Maya is attractive,



HOMELAND INSECURITY: Jessica Chastain in “Zero Dark Thirty”

# Procula's Tears

*Mt 27:19*

The city suffocates with the smell  
Of hemp, soaked in blood, everywhere.  
Hour after hour after hour she tosses  
From one nightmare to another.  
Her bed sheets, once silvered  
With the scent of nard, taste of gall.  
She dreams she sees her husband, the prefect  
Of equivocation, leaning over the portico  
Trying to appease the mob's spite.

A blood-drenched man with woven thorns  
Crowning his head stands before him.  
He seems to speak in monosyllables  
Laced with ancient prophecies.  
Something deep within her says to intervene  
Plead with the fates, and reverse history,  
To barter this god man's life for human years.

As night vanishes some deeper dark descends.  
In the late morning frenzy that follows  
She sends her husband her dream  
Rolled in a scroll, which he unravels  
Then lets drop.

What he has written he has written. A cross  
Casts its shadow across her warning. Is this the Christ?  
Or just one more raw-boned prisoner  
Sentenced to die on Mars' day.

**PHILIP C. KOLIN**

**PHILIP C. KOLIN** *has just published a volume of poetry, Reading God's Handwriting. He recently founded Vineyards: A Journal of Christian Poetry.*

vulnerable and sympathetic enough to put flesh and blood on a story that is largely about electronic surveillance, track-and-trace technology and the less-than-cinematic wonders of G.P.S.

It should also be said that Chastain, who has been accused in some quarters of giving a "chilly" or "remote" performance, does exactly what she is supposed to do. Maya is something close to a lunatic, manically engaged in finding the mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks to a degree that precludes her having any other life. One could say that Bigelow and Boal do not give us enough information about Maya, not enough backstory. But there isn't any. As we learn, she was recruited out of high school to join the Central Intelligence Agency and has been religiously devoted to capturing Bin Laden ever since. (If there's romance in "Zero Dark Thirty," it is between hunter and prey.) Her C.I.A. boss, played by James Gandolfini, an unlikely sub for Leon Panetta, asks her what she has done for the agency besides hunt for bin Laden. "I've done nothing else," she says. She's Nancy Drew, with obsessive-compulsive disorder.

In a very encouraging sense, Maya is a stand-in for an America that was, and seemingly is (see: drones), willing to abandon democratic principles to kill its enemies.

But there also seems very little doubt that Bigelow and Boal drank the intelligence community Kool-Aid. When it was learned early on that the "Zero Dark Thirty" project was receiving privileged access to Department of Defense and C.I.A. information surrounding the Bin Laden pursuit, there was a knee-jerk outcry among certain congressional Republicans that a pro-Obama film was in the works. (The project was under way well before Bin Laden was killed in 2011 and had to be quickly refashioned.) The fears were unfounded. President Obama, circa 2008, does make an appearance in the film, on a television screen, decrying the

use of torture and the damage it has done to the moral standing of the United States in the world. The film shakes its head in disgust.

The head-shaking should be on the other side of the screen. Without going into too much excruciating detail, suffice it to say that “Zero Dark Thirty” reaches the indirect but unavoidable conclusion that torture worked, that the key piece of information that led to bin Laden was achieved through waterboarding and the variety of deprivations suffered by detainees. It also suggests, in a manner that only film can do, that a government that forbids enhanced interrogation is tying the hands of its overseas operatives, who have much more important things to worry about than petty politics back home.

This ignores the conclusions reached by the petty politicians on the Senate Intelligence Committee, who include John McCain, the Republican senator from Arizona. Their study of the C.I.A.’s detention and interrogation program concluded—following the examination of more than six million pages of records from the intelligence community—that the C.I.A. did not obtain its first clues about the identity of Bin Laden’s courier from “C.I.A. detainees subjected to coercive interrogation techniques.”

But saying otherwise certainly makes for exhilarating cinema. The torture scenes that follow the very opening of the movie—a series of voices in darkness, from people trapped in the World Trade Center, and whose plight deftly sets up the movie’s revenge mechanism—are deeply disturbing. They dehumanize the “heroes” as much as the “villains”—which was one of the critical findings, following the investigations into the Abu Ghraib and Bagram and Guantánamo detention centers. One of the things “Zero Dark Thirty” does not do is a dance of victory after the death of Bin Laden. No one is more conflicted in the end than Maya, who

has spent 10 years and her entire young adulthood in search of a something that, when it finally arrives, just leaves her empty.

“Zero Dark Thirty” is a magnificent movie—if we ignore the moral ambiguities. But can we? Louis-Ferdinand Céline was a rabid anti-Semite; Ezra Pound was a fascist; Leni Riefenstahl was a propagandist for Hitler. But no reasonable person would say they were not great artists, or that their work is

not worth viewing or reading, albeit with caution. All art is about truth, and each artist arrives at his or her own version, presumably after careful consideration of the alternatives (which, perhaps, is why fundamentalists are not usually artists, and why Hitler was a bad painter).

What adds to the disturbance surrounding “Zero Dark Thirty” is its makers’ insistence that what they have done is both truth and just a movie.

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Bigelow has repeatedly called her new work a “reported film,” and she wields a palette of documentary techniques in applying a coat of veracity to her time-compressed story. At the same time, she and Boal—who reported the reported film—counter accusations of being pro-torture (or, rather, not vehemently enough against it) with the claim that their movie is told from the perspective of the participants and therefore should be viewed with the cocked eyebrow with which we address any work of fiction.

Can they have it both ways? Of course they can. And they do. Several critics groups, including the New York Film Critics Circle (to which this

reviewer belongs) have named it the best picture of 2012, even if a certain voter’s remorse seems to have settled in. It will be interesting to see whether Hollywood, with its allegedly leftist leanings, will endorse a film that takes such a controversial position and whose director seems genuinely dismayed at the reactions she has gotten. One way of defining art, after all, is as something that achieves exactly the effect its maker intended. If ambiguity was Bigelow’s intention, she has created a masterpiece.

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**JOHN ANDERSON** is a film critic for *Variety* and *The Washington Post* and a regular contributor to the *Arts & Leisure* section of *The New York Times*.

## BOOKS | MICHAEL PEPPARD

# EARLY CHRISTIANS WERE RICH?

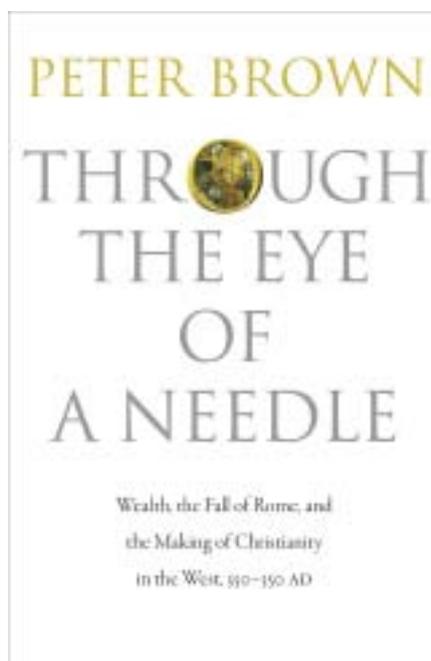
## THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE

Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD

Peter Brown  
Princeton University Press. 806p \$39.95

“Woe to you who are rich!” (Lk 6:24), said Jesus. “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mt 19:24). Agrarian peasants in first-century Galilee no doubt cheered at such indictments of the wealthy in their zero-sum economy, which was marked by stark income inequality. But how did the economic message of Jesus ring out centuries later, when in the late fourth and fifth centuries—for the first time—the church became rich?

Historians, including Peter Brown himself, have often focused on the ascetic response in late antiquity, by



which holy men and women renounced wealth, sex, domestic life and civic honor to seek virtuosic communion with God. In the current book, however, Brown argues against treating “the renouncers of wealth as

the heroes and heroines of a ‘true’ Christianity” or considering “all other forms of religious giving as somehow a betrayal of the essential radicalism of the Christian movement.” Rather, Brown’s task is “reconstructing the imaginative content of religious giving” in all its quotidian forms: weekly offerings, gifts to the poor, donations to building projects, constructions of funerary monuments, payments of vows, supporting clergymen and teachers and so on.

Brown’s survey of wealth in late Roman society shows that the rise of the Christian rich did not completely alter the societal landscape. Romans had long maintained that “the possession of wealth should be legitimated (or at least be given a more gentle face) by acts of generosity.” The primary change involved not the deeds but their recipients and outcomes. In short, Roman culture was devoted to city life: the ancient and deep social transaction that traded civic benefactions for civic honors was enacted through games, sacrifices, feasts and processions and memorialized through titles, ranks, statues and monuments.

The Christian innovation was twofold: first, benefactions were redirected from the “citizens” to the “poor,” social groups whose fundamental distinctions Brown vividly delineates; second, the outcome of individual generosity was transferred from a monument in a town forum to “treasure in heaven.”

The theological teachings of Jesus and Paul were meaningless apart from economic metaphors—debt, gift (“grace”), redemption, treasure, reward. Brown charts how, over the long fifth century, Christian leaders painted such biblical images on the Roman cultural backdrop of the honors-for-benefactions structure. The ensuing drama transpired locally and regionally. Each city’s emerging Christian leaders were writing scripts

in which local elites could play the new role of a wealthy *and* honorable Christian.

The logic and metaphors of commercial transaction were not rejected but appropriated in many local attempts “to consolidate the Christian community.” Bishops like Ambrose and Augustine “preached urgently” in order to “tame and redirect” the “adrenalin of civic love,” which pulsed through their newly wealthy congregations.

As over 20 discrete chapters of microhistories show, the adaptation of Roman cultural ideology to a Christian piety of giving had mixed results. Then, as now, the preachers were not always persuasive. Brown’s “unremitting sense of place” assures the reader that few sweeping generalizations are forthcoming in the book’s conclusion. But some leaders were successful in promoting regular pious giving of small donations as a means by which to expiate sin and secure a kind of heavenly retirement account. “Seek heaven with a pious heart,” proclaimed an inscription from a church in Mauretania, “through donating a few cubes of mosaic.”

Each chapter is effortlessly guided by Brown’s distinctive style. It is doubtful the book could have undergone a really “blind” peer review, because every student and scholar of late antiquity would recognize the trademarks of the author’s historical prose: the explication of both continuity and change; attention to all possible types of evidence, especially those that reveal glimpses of non-elites (e.g., tombstones); ample comparisons to other cultures and to the contemporary world; and a wonderfully dynamic style of translation of ancient texts. We find aspects of the late ancient world compared to toxic factories, polar ice caps, crystalline pseudomorphosis, 1960s-style teach-in and sumo wrestling, just to name a few memorable analogies.

It is also doubtful that any other

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**LENTEN VESPERS 2013**

*Thomas Merton's Baptism 75th Anniversary*

**FEBRUARY 17 AN EVANGELICAL READS MERTON**

Preacher: Matthew Vaughan, doctoral student, Union Theological Seminary  
Music: Barnard-Columbia Chamber Choir, Gail Archer, director and organist

**FEBRUARY 24 TRANSFORMING DESERTS:  
THOMAS MERTON'S LENTEN WISDOM**

Preacher: Kathleen Deignan, c.s.m., President, International Thomas Merton Society  
Music: Will Casott, guitarist, Manhattan School of Music

**MARCH 3 A DESERT CRY, A PROPHET'S CALL:  
MERTON'S MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE**

Preacher: Daniel Horan, o.f.m., theologian and author  
Music: The Riverside Chamber Singers, Christopher Croughan, organist; Christopher Johnson, director and organist

**MARCH 10 MERCY WITHIN MERCY WITHIN MERCY:  
THE GOD OF JONAH AND THOMAS MERTON**

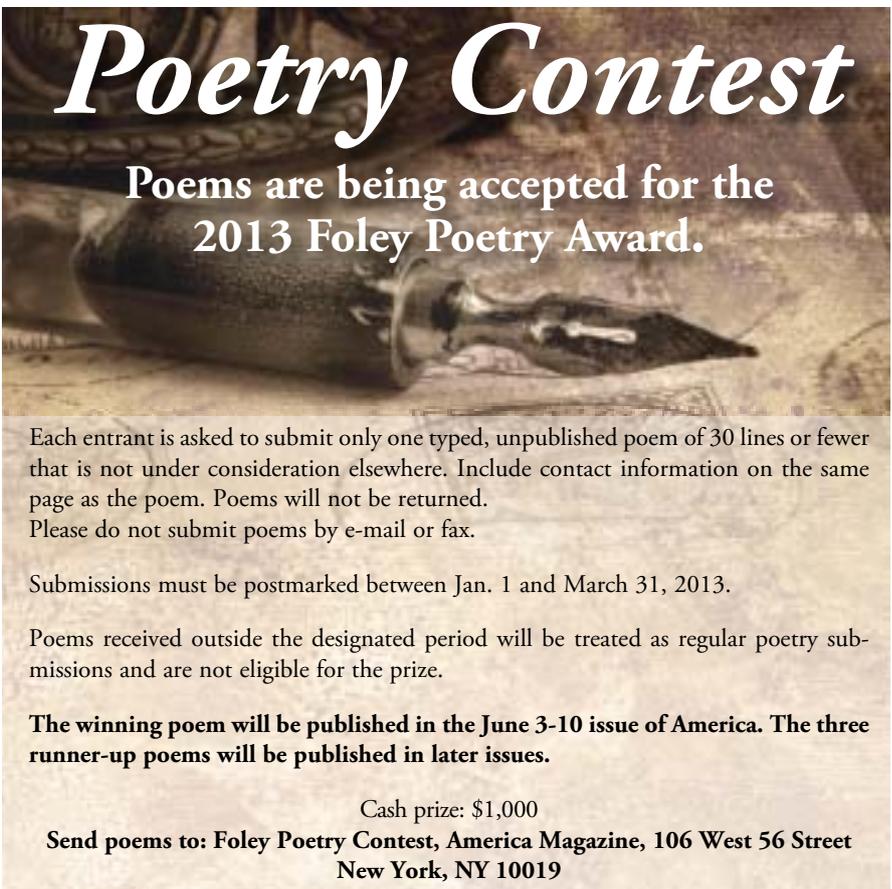
Preacher: Michael Picken, Barnard College, City University of New York  
Music: The Choir of Corpus Christi Church, Louise Kabisas, director and organist

**MARCH 17 TOM MERTON'S PARISH**

Preacher: Rev. Raymond M. Bailey, Corpus Christi Church  
Music: Jeremy Rizzio, baroque violinist, Julliard Historical Performance

# Poetry Contest

## Poems are being accepted for the 2013 Foley Poetry Award.



Each entrant is asked to submit only one typed, unpublished poem of 30 lines or fewer that is not under consideration elsewhere. Include contact information on the same page as the poem. Poems will not be returned. Please do not submit poems by e-mail or fax.

Submissions must be postmarked between Jan. 1 and March 31, 2013.

Poems received outside the designated period will be treated as regular poetry submissions and are not eligible for the prize.

**The winning poem will be published in the June 3-10 issue of America. The three runner-up poems will be published in later issues.**

Cash prize: \$1,000

**Send poems to: Foley Poetry Contest, America Magazine, 106 West 56 Street  
New York, NY 10019**

current historian could have written it. No search engine can do this work. Obscure points of social history are plucked from unheralded monuments, sermons and speeches from every corner of the empire. Even seasoned scholars will learn something on every page. As an example of Brown's labor-intensive style of argument through miniscule details, he cites in passing a unique reference to a slang term for the "poor box" at Augustine's church in Hippo: it was called the *quadriga*, "the four-horse chariot that swung low to sweep the alms of the faithful (as it had once swept the prophet Elijah himself) far beyond the stars to heaven." By the end of the book, Brown has shown through hundreds of such examples the transformations of late antiquity with respect to wealth.

JAMES M. LANG

## EXCAVATING AMERICA

### THE STORY OF AMERICA

#### Essays on Origins

By Jill Lepore

Princeton University Press. 427p \$27.95

If you paused in your day to watch the presidential inauguration ceremonies on Jan. 20 and 21, you observed a series of rituals that seem firmly scripted and deeply embedded in America's past. The president, for example, placed his hand on a Bible, uttered an oath laid down by the Constitution and concluded with a brief acknowledgment of the divine: "So help me God." Following the official ceremony, he offered his inaugural address to the American people, setting the tone and agenda for his four years in office. Like all of our public rituals, the ceremony strikes viewers as providing an unbroken link to our rich national history, bonding today's president—and his

Like other great works of historiography, this book feels timeless and timely at the same time—an instant classic. Christians have always been and currently are concerned about income inequality and about finding the proper balance between individual acts of charity and just civic structures. But like a master chef, Brown does not remind the reader of how seasonally appropriate his product is. Nowhere does the prose trumpet, "Look how relevant this is!" Rather, we devour the book and leave satisfied by its heartiness and subtlety, fully aware that all the ingredients were in season and artfully prepared by a master.

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**MICHAEL PEPPARD**, author of *The Son of God in the Roman World* (Oxford University Press), is an assistant professor of theology at Fordham University in New York.

people—to those who have served before him.

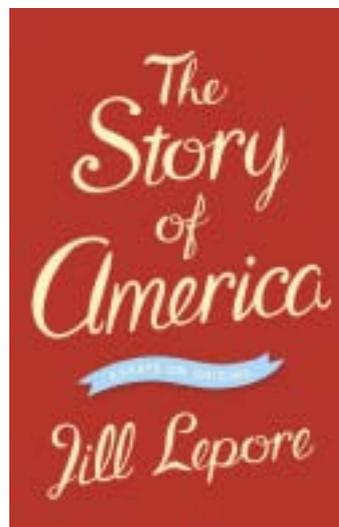
And yet, as Jill Lepore details in the concluding essay of *Excavating America*, very little of what we see in the inaugural ceremony comes to us scripted by either the Constitution, the traditions of the distant past or—for that matter—our nation's religious heritage. The Constitution calls only for the new president to swear the official oath. It does not require the oath-taker to place his (or her) hand on the Bible. That was a last-minute decision George

Washington made on the morning of his inauguration; and while most presidents have followed his precedent,

Franklin Pierce did not. Neither does the Constitution require the president to offer a post-ceremony address. After his inauguration, Washington addressed members of congress at Federal Hall. "He made," Lepore says, "no pretense of speaking to the American people." The first open-air inaugural address was made by James Monroe in 1807. And while we might appreciate the pious sentiment of "So help me God," the concluding phrase of most presidential oath-takers, that phrase does not appear in the official oath of office, and may never have escaped the lips of George Washington or his immediate successors.

Historical excavations of our political traditions, like the one offered in this piece, seem to come easily for Lepore, a Harvard historian who has gathered into this volume a collection of 20-like-minded essays, most of them reprints or revisions of pieces originally published by *The New Yorker*. Lovers of the leisurely, digressive prose of that magazine will welcome this happy yoking together of so many finely crafted meditations on American history, politics and literature.

You will not find a single guiding thread in the essays gathered here, although you will find constant attention to the genre of history itself. Lepore wants us to understand that while our past comes to us through documents, "documents aren't to be trusted." They require interpretation, and that act of interpretation can be a deeply political one. "The heart of politics," she argues in her introduction, "is describing how things came to be the way they are in such a way as to con-



vince people that you know how to make things the way they ought to be." By that definition, the role of the historian—who describes "how things came to be the way they are"—looms large in the political process.

And so Lepore offers us an essay, for example, detailing the trope of the presidential campaign biography—whether that comes in the form of a multi-volume tome or a convention video. Unsurprisingly, most campaign biographies tell the story of a plucky youth who overcame adverse circumstances in his rise to political power. I watched political campaign videos this season with a much clearer view of the ways in which aspiring officeholders were crafting their biographies in order to mold themselves to this firmly established narrative. In another essay, wittily entitled "Rock, Paper, Scissors," she narrates the history of voting in America—not in some broad sense, but finely focused on the actual process of stuffing a ballot into a hole or marking an X on a piece of paper. Just as she did with the inaugural ceremonies, she provides a fascinating account of the patchwork history of the voting process in America, highlighting the contingent nature of both past and present practices.

Her historical and critical lens extends beyond politics. Essays on Edgar Allan Poe and Charlie Chan sit side-by-side with stories of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, or a reflection on the post-civil war migration of American blacks from the South to the North. In "A Nue Merrykin Dikshunary," Lepore takes on the strange biography of lexicographer Noah Webster, a political arch-conservative whose liberal views on language led him to publish the first American dictionary. Definitions pulled from his first edition show how Webster grounded his definitions in illustrations from American life—and how his definitions reflect-

ed his deeply held Christian beliefs.

In "Longfellow's Ride," her dismantling of almost every fact narrated in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous poem "Paul Revere's Ride" leads her to a nuanced and complex reading of the poem—one in which she argues that Longfellow had less interest in the story of Paul Revere and the American Revolution than he did in offering a covert rallying cry to his fellow abolitionists at the outbreak of the Civil War.

Given the broad range of subjects in this book, any reader with even the most passing interest in the history of America will find here at least an essay or two on a favorite topic and plenty of essays that will stimulate interest in historical and political subjects that remain central to us today. But most readers will also find themselves, as I occasionally did, skimming through essays on subjects that held little interest for them and that were perhaps not well served by Lepore's conversational,

digressive style. That wandering essay form, made famous by writers for the *The New Yorker* and their imitators, works well when you are sitting down with a magazine article after a long day. But, as a colleague rightly pointed out to me, it can wear thin over the course of 20 essays in a single volume. More than 300 pages of sharp turns and winding pathways can leave one feeling dizzy and exhausted, stumbling wearily toward the finish line of a long trail race.

Still, I do not hesitate to recommend this book to lovers of American history and literature, who will find themselves mostly relishing Lepore's deeply researched and elegantly written essays, newly aware of the shifting grounds of some of America's most deeply held historical myths and traditions.

**JAMES M. LANG** is an associate professor of English at Assumption College in Worcester, Mass.

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# INVENTING THE FUTURE

## THE IDEA FACTORY

### Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation

By Jon Gertner

Penguin Books. 432p \$29.95

Each invention and new research into technological possibilities has its own story, and we can now add to the best of them the latest and probably most compelling one of our time. It is told in the book *The Idea Factory*, by Jon Gertner, a history of the Bell Telephone Laboratories—or Bell Labs—the epic research center that served the American Telephone and Telegraph Company.

AT&T was founded by Alexander Graham Bell, who invented the telephone more than a century ago. Over time AT&T became a government-sanctioned monopoly, granted to ensure that the newly expanding telephone system—in other words, communications—would be developed in a uniform way, unfettered by disruptive conflicts among competing corporations. It was, in a sense, a public utility whose development had to be federally nurtured for the good of the country.

So what did Bell Labs actually do? Basically, over the years it was busy extending the future. First, it invented the transistor, which led to semiconductors that were composed of, and increasingly packed with, transistors. The tiny transistor was truly a miracle device because it replaced vacuum tubes. Vacuum tubes were hot, heavy, expensive, demanded too much electricity and were too large for the housing needed for the equipment. Transistors generated less heat and were miniscule. Most useful are Gertner's efforts to give the reader a full reading of the inventors' personali-

ties, complete with foibles and virtues.

The transmission/voice/switching story serves as the groundwork for the astonishingly inventive era Bell Labs enjoyed for three decades, which will probably never be repeated by one single organization. The story calls upon mathematics, physics, chemistry and the specialty sciences accompanied by brilliance and cooperation.

Consider the communication satellites (the original was called Telstar), the field of radio astronomy, contributions to the development of radar, the invention and original use of digitized computers, the theory and science that made possible the “bit” system of computer language, the laser and basic work in the invention of synthetic rubber during World War II. Add key contributions to the science needed for effective cold war espionage and, highly important, the initial and continuous development of solid state science for the underlying materials that made possible the electronics behind communications. The list is easily extended, but the point is that these and more inventions made possible just about every communication product we see around us today.

The accomplishments of Bell Labs then were the epic phenomenon of the 20th century. A few Bell Labs scientists saw early what the research would accomplish over time. One was John Pierce, the inventor of Telstar and much else. He said that because of the products that Bell Labs produced, “all electronic exchanges—letters, calls,

data, television—were likely to merge.” And so, as everyone now knows, they did, and fairly recently, at an almost blinding rate.

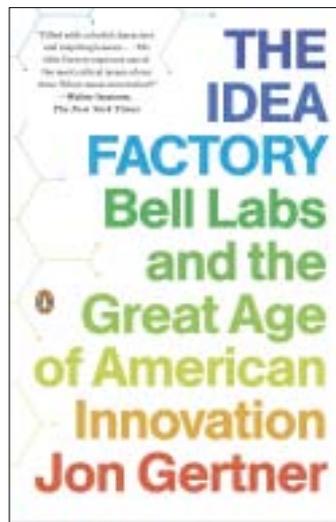
The paradox of Bell Labs is that its success led to the diminution of AT&T. Everyone who has carefully observed Bell Labs would add, “Why, of course it would,” since the things produced by Bell Labs simply exceeded the ability of AT&T to use them. The company's history was in voice communication. It could not easily absorb the immense potential of the laser, fiber optics and the full development and marketing of the cell phone. The merger of these innovations that led to the new era of communications escaped their enthusiasm. Significantly, other companies fought for their own roles and filed suits

demanding equal standing with AT&T in the competition for markets. Communications was no longer the industry of a single corporation. It would grow without boundaries and turn out to be fiercely competitive.

Federal litigation against the monopoly function of AT&T led to its breakup, which further led to the diminution of Bell Labs until it became a unit of a company called Alcatel-Lucent that was devoted to competing with other communication companies for the development of communication products. Basic research, except for a few laboratories here and there, essentially disappeared.

The social consequences of the information revolution and its relentless expansion now fill numerous books, including the recent biography of Steve Jobs.

The key questions now are social



and moral. Many of them early concerned William O. Baker who headed the Labs a couple of decades before today's era of communications began.

People spend full days communicating by smartphones, crowding out true, traditional human discourse and producing discourse of other kinds. But sharing information among those with serious intentions to improve the human condition can also depend on these new communication systems. Think of Africa, where so much communication is carried out today by cell phone, and where iPads are increasingly common.

The best solution for satisfying human needs is to recognize the need for communications and the sharing of knowledge, says Steven Johnson, author of *Future Perfect: The Case for Progress in a Networked Age*. "The world is filled with countless needs for community, creativity, education, personal and environmental health that traditional markets do a poor job of satisfying."

Michael Saylor, author of *The Mobile Wave: How Mobile Intelligence Will Change Everything*, says, "Mobile computing will provide a universal computing platform to the majority of humankind and will spur the creation of innumerable new applications that are not possible without a universal networked computer that is carried on one person 24 hours a day. It means the disruption of long-standing behavior." Saylor adds, "Each revolution creates an upheaval requiring new rules and new cultural dynamics. Information and automation will lead to loss of anonymity. There will always be a trail of who you are, where you are, and what you do. Even as we establish rules to protect the data and limit its use it will still exist. So...it will be a matter of information forensics to dig it up."

Indeed so. The new problems and challenges are just beginning when the world's cyber communicators have access to an enlarging family of others.

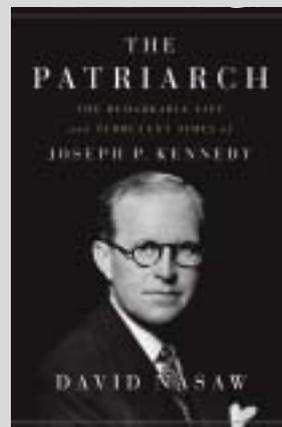
Yes, we will be enabled to apply our mobile communications to new kinds of social good. But mustn't we also ask what innovative forms of evil might ride the ethers. Might we need a new form of Bell Labs as a new center of

research devoted to the ethical implications of all that is unfolding before us?

**WIL LEPKOWSKI** is a science writer, editor and researcher.

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## LETTERS

### Liberation Approach

As a lay missionary in western Honduras, I'm grateful for "Still 'Presente'?" by David Golemboski (1/21), especially for the emphasis on economic issues in Central America. The economic issues are harder for U.S. Catholics to deal with, especially the social and political aspects that involve U.S. trade policy and the actions of major corporations.

I am involved in two "sister parish" relationships. People do seek relationships and the sharing of faith; but without some careful analysis, this can become another way for U.S. Catholics to be "good neighbors," emphasizing the personal but not really facing the fact that the neighborhood needs to be changed and that U.S. policy has negative effects on the

neighborhood.

Many of the base communities in Central America are not those of the 1970s and 1980s, which incorporated a strong social analysis. The hierarchy is generally much less inclined to speak out forthrightly on the issues. There are exceptions, of course, including several Guatemalan bishops.

In the long-term, more needs to be discussed, researched and done. It won't be like the solidarity of the 1980s, nor should it be. But I do believe that a liberation approach, one that recognizes and encourages the participation of the poor in the church and the nations, is critical for real change to happen.

JOHN DONAGHY  
*Santa Rosa de Copán, Honduras*

### Mass Incarceration

I heartily concur with the sentiments of your editorial "Conflict of Interest"

parishes on the 20- by 40-square mile Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Comfortable trailer, car and insurance provided. Salary negotiable. Contact: josephrr@mtintouch.net, or call (406) 673-3300. Joseph R. Retzel, S.J., Pastor; St. Paul's Mission, Hays, MT 59527-0040.

### Translator

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(1/7), which scrutinizes the machinations of the Corrections Corporation of America.

Anyone seeking to re-enforce such suspicions of for-profit prisons should read Michelle Alexander's powerful book, *The New Jim Crow*. In it Ms. Alexander, a civil rights attorney, demonstrates how mass incarceration has been propelled by the so-called war on drugs. Spawned under the watch of Ronald Reagan, the war on drugs fostered discriminatory procedures and laws that disproportionately penalize African Americans.

At the same time, it is no accident that many benefit from the war on drugs. Police agencies are rewarded in proportion to the number of drug-related arrests. Furthermore, private investors have now found that constructing new prisons can be quite lucrative—and, sadly, they benefit most when the prisons are full.

It is ironic that programs in crime prevention and rehabilitation are deemed entitlements, while astronomically expensive and highly unwarranted mass incarceration is deemed to be in the public interest.

CHARLES BUTERA  
*East Northport, N.Y.*

### Redemption Is Possible

"That Man is Me," by the Rev. Charles Klamut (1/7), reminds me of Christ's injunction: "For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26). Only the grace of God acting through Monseigneur Bienvenu, the bishop of Digne, could have reached a man as embittered, as numb, as fatalistic as Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.

God's grace is not the cold predestination of Calvinism, but an offer of freedom from the powers of this world. Without this grace, many of us would be powerless and inexorably condemned by a seemingly arbitrary and often merciless fate.

I pity poor Javert's inflexible adher-

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**PASTORAL ASSOCIATE.** Montana Indian Reservation parish makes request for religious woman to minister in following capacities: director of religious education; provide weekly day-time presence at parish/parish center; provide pre-baptismal instruction/preparation for approximately 80 families. Be a part of (though living at Lodgepole nine miles from) an active community of three Sparkill Dominican Sisters, four Jesuit Volunteers teaching in our mission grade school and two Jesuit priests staffing three separate

ence to the laws of man. The law is made by men. We all have to respect it, but we must not allow it to become a good unto itself. There is a higher law. Javert was imprisoned in a purely human and technical concept of justice. Pure justice, untempered by mercy, can be a terrible thing. For Javert, it all ends in despair, in the Seine.

The French Revolution was a horrible historical episode that turned into an example of human will run amok. The story of Valjean, however, is real to us. It is the redemption of someone beyond redemption—the story of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary.

MATTHEW F. TERRANOVA  
Hackensack, N.J.

### Following Jesus

My experience was like that of Father Charles Klamut, described in “That Man Is Me.” In 1946, as a sophomore in a Catholic high school, I read *Les Misérables*. The story of Monseigneur Bienvenu left an indelible impression on me about how a sincere follower of Jesus ought to live—an important influence in my life, although I chose the route of marriage and an engineering career.

The book was recommended by my mother, who, despite having to quit school after eighth grade, was exceptionally well educated. Since the book was still on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (it was finally removed in 1959), my book report raised some eyebrows among my teachers, Sisters of St. Joseph, but it was still accepted.

Could Victor Hugo ever have imagined that 150 years later his work would still be an inspiration, and to such a huge audience?

DON RAMPOLLA  
Torrance, Calif.

### A Special Gift

Thank you, Marlana Portolano, for your article “Sign of God” (1/7) about Joseph Bruce, S.J., a deaf priest who ministers to a deaf congregation in

Maryland. The Milwaukee Archdiocese recently ordained and assigned the Rev. Christopher Klusman to St. Roman Parish and to the deaf ministry at St. Matthias Parish. My parents, who are deaf and Catholic, are absolutely thrilled. We had the privilege of being at his first Christmas Mass, where he signed with great fervor and the parishioners responded in kind.

For my parents and other deaf, a deaf priest is a special gift. After 80 years, my folks are finally having confession, Bible classes and the Eucharist in their own language by one of their own. The response to Father Chris has been overwhelmingly positive from the deaf and hearing members. Indeed, more deaf shepherds are needed.

FRAN KNOLL  
College Park, Md.

### End Petroleum Subsidies

Re “City Limits,” by Kyle T. Kramer (12/24): Industrial agriculture and manufacturing have been necessary conditions for the abnormal growth of cities. But industrial processes would not be sufficient were it not for the petroleum windfall.

Cheap oil has fueled the transportation networks required to secure inputs and discard resources disguised as wastes. But the inevitable end of cheap oil spells disaster for metropolitan areas, a disaster that could be avoided by a preemptive attack—not on Iraq or Iran or God’s children elsewhere on God’s good earth, but on petroleum subsidies.

The phasing in of a carbon tax would sound a strategic retreat from metropolitan areas back to sustainable and distributed economies. Otherwise, the

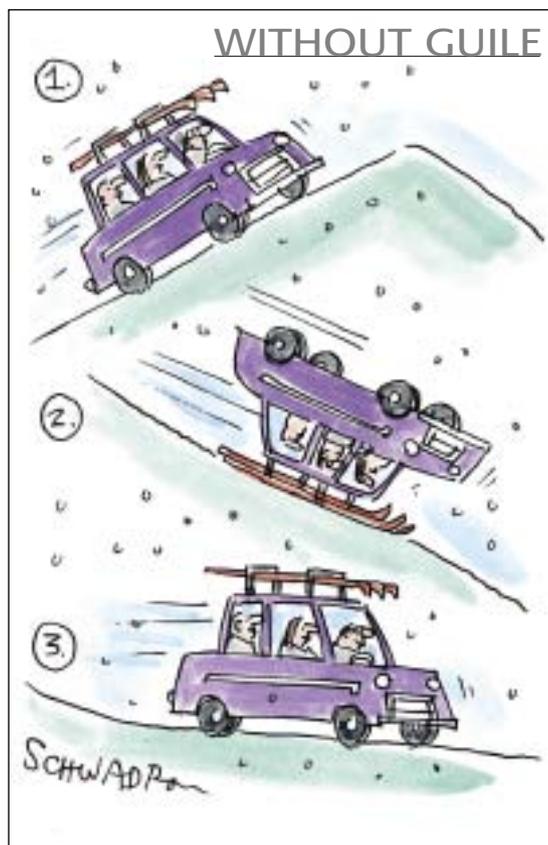
city is bound to implode to a size that nature, standing in for God, will nurture. Escaping survivors had best learn how to farm again without the use of inorganic fertilizers and chemical pesticides applied to expansive monocultures zoned far from human habitation.

ERNEST MARTINSON  
Hayward, Wis.

### Transformative Process

“After Ideology,” by Ivan J. Kauffman (12/10), reminded me of the process our U.S. bishops created for writing the pastoral letters on peace and the economy in the 1980s. By engaging with experts across all divides, they were able to produce living documents that at their root were transformational.

This approach came to a grinding halt with the attempt to write a pastoral on women in the church. Rome intervened, and that was the end of this socially fruitful and collegial approach. Ever since then, it seems, the



U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops remains ruled by fear of this kind of intervention—and not without some cause.

Perhaps it is time for some leadership to emerge once again within the U.S.C.C.B. that will resurrect that process. Their impulse was a good one: Engage the best thinkers and

practitioners across the divides within church and society in a process that, in its very nature, holds the promise of transcending and transforming.

CAROL STANTON  
Orlando, Fla.

### Grateful for Chaplains

Re the letters to the editor from Ben

Jimenez, S.J., and Joseph E. Mulligan, S.J. (12/10): Permit this defense of the military chaplaincy. Chaplains exist for the military personnel—and their dependents—to remind them that morality may not be forsaken either in the field or at the garrison gate.

Organizationally, chaplains are part of the commander's "special staff" for formal advice and counsel. But they are also the links in an informal chain from troops to successively higher headquarters.

A chaplain's field visit was always publicized and well attended. I remember Mass on the hood of a Jeep, below deck on a transport and in a tent under lantern-light. For troops, these events seemed like touchstones to their earlier civilian formation. For those chaplains, I remain grateful.

JAMES A. MAHANEY  
Brooklyn, N.Y.



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# Turn Back to God

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT (C), FEB. 17, 2013

Readings: Dt 26:4-10; Ps 91:1-15; Rom 10:8-13; Lk 4:1-13

*“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Rom 10:13)*

Lent is a time to prepare for spiritual transformation, whether this will be signified by the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil or by other rites and signs of conversion. But in order to prepare for transformation one must turn back to God. This is not easy, and those who have turned back to God sometimes feel the mysterious tug of evil, simultaneously so repellent and attractive.

In Exodus, the people of Israel, while enslaved in Egypt, turn to God in their suffering: “Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them” (2:23-25). In Chapter 26 of the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses presents this same event to the people at the end of their long journey from slavery and wandering in the wilderness, recalling that “when the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.” The starting point for the liberation of the Israelites is the cry to God. There were, though, numerous temptations throughout these 40 years, during which the Israelites, including Moses personally, stumbled. But Israel continued to get up and turn back to God.

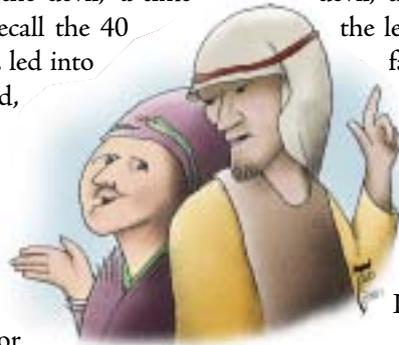
Jesus, on the other hand, is present-

ed in Luke as offering perfect resistance to wilderness temptation. Jesus “was led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days, to be tempted by the devil,” a time period meant to recall the 40 years the Israelites, led into the desert by God, stumbled and grumbled while wandering. The temptations the devil presents to Jesus in Luke’s narrative mirror realities that tempt us all. The devil tempts Jesus during his fasting with bread, the promise of earthly power and glory, and his own self-reliance by reciting words from the very source to which Jesus will turn to resist them—God’s word.

Each time Jesus is tempted he turns to Scripture and finds his spiritual sustenance in passages precisely from the time of the Israelites’ wandering and stumbling. When tempted by bread, he cites Dt 8:3, where Moses explains that reliance on manna taught the Israelites not to rely on bread alone but to be fed “by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” When offered power and glory if only he would worship the king of this world, Jesus turns to Dt 6:4-13 to stress the unique worship of God. The devil then cites Scripture back at Jesus (Ps 91:11-12), challenging and taunting him to put God to the test, to see if God is truly there for him. Jesus resists the temptation to use Scripture not as a sign of dependence upon God, but to

satisfy his doubts. He cites Deuteronomy a third time—“do not put the Lord your God to the test” (6:16)—exhibiting his willingness to wait on God’s plan and not to substitute his own schemes, a lesson drawn from the wandering of the Israelites in the desert.

Jesus’ unique character and being allow him never to turn away from God, even in the face of stark temptation. He grounds his defiance of the devil, though, in the example of the lessons learned through the failings and persistence of the Israelites. They both become for us perfect models. The fact that the Scripture passages cited by Jesus all come from the time of the Israelites’ wandering in the



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- What am I doing to get ready to be transformed?
- What Scripture passages sustain me?
- What passages have brought me to call out to God again and again?

desert indicates that those lessons ought to remain a model for us, as they did for Jesus. In the face of temptation, one turns away from sin and turns back to God. One turns back to the events in which God raised up and sustained those who stumbled; one turns back to the Scriptures, which tell us to cry out to the Lord.

Spiritual transformation, though, is tricky business, and we may wish that our cry to the Lord would stick and that temptations and our willingness to indulge them would finally end. Yet our own stumbles, like those of the Israelites, make us no less worthy to call on God and turn back to him, again and again.

**JOHN W. MARTENS**

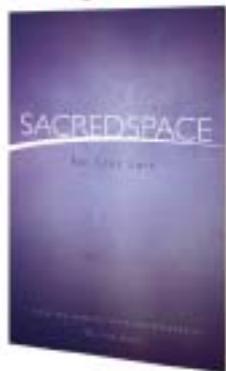
**JOHN W. MARTENS** is associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.

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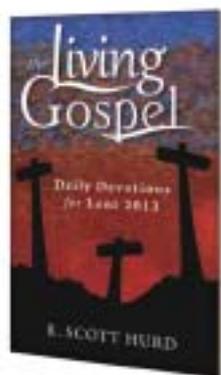
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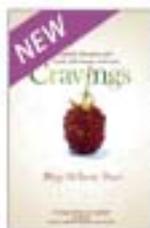
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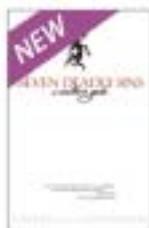
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