TRAVEL ISSUE

America

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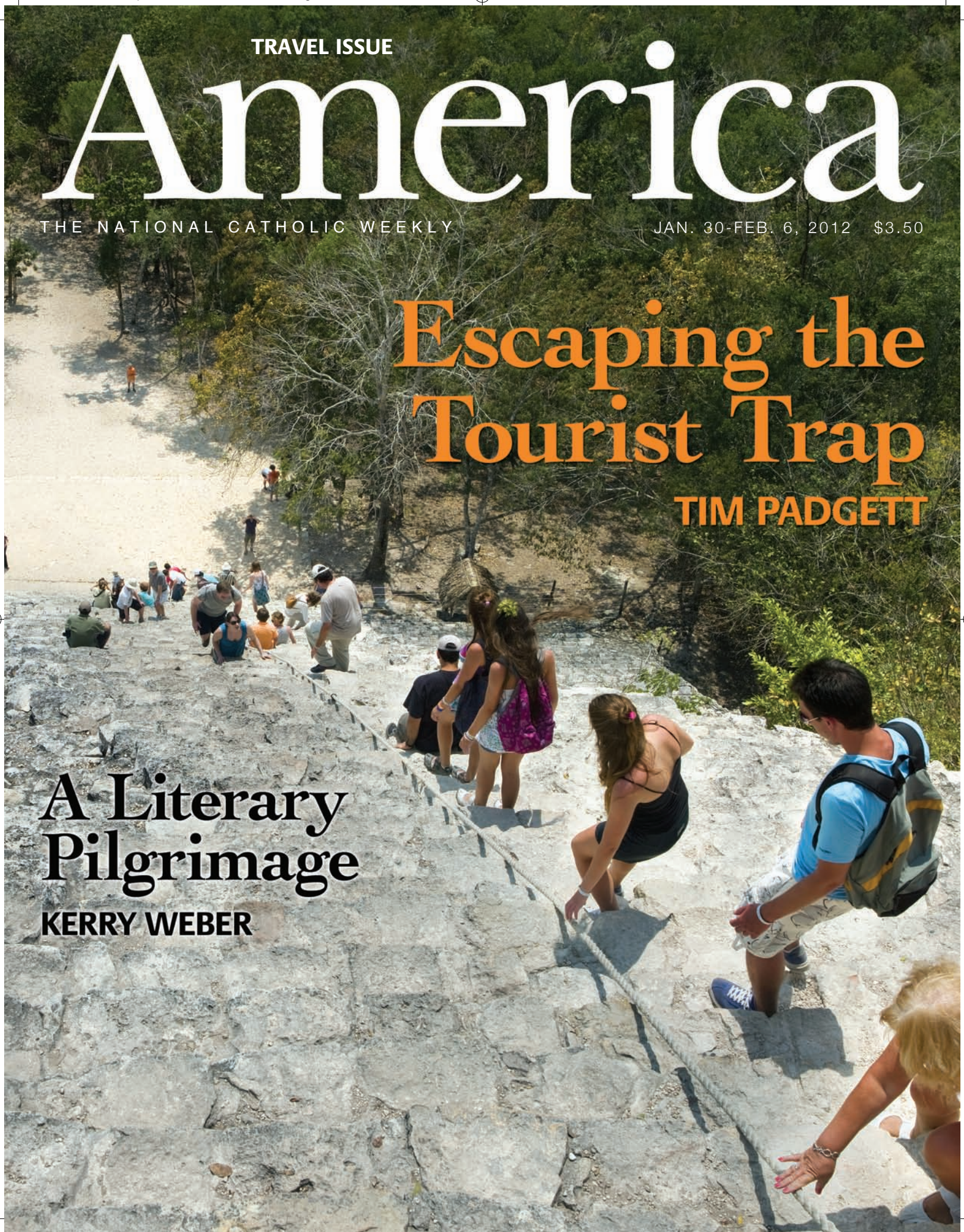
Escaping the Tourist Trap

TIM PADGETT

A Literary Pilgrimage

KERRY WEBER



OF MANY THINGS

Goodbyes do not come easy for me. They never have. Yet I have earmarked this column to do just that. After 13 years at **America**, dear readers, I am hanging up my tap shoes on Feb. 1 (actually, that could never be completely true, since I am a veteran of community theater), ready to embrace the retired life. How fitting that this column appears in our travel/pilgrimage issue because increased travel is part of my long-range plan. So too is volunteer work (with my favorite causes: the lonely and/or institutionalized elderly and four-legged homeless friends). And perhaps also may come a dash of freelance work down the line.

The memories are many—and grand! Likewise they are indelibly etched into my consciousness. First and foremost, I am grateful to Father Tom Reese for offering me the unique opportunity to serve as a lay editor among a group of brilliant and collegial Jesuits.

Editorial board meetings during the early years were spirited, often jocular—thanks to the dry wit of (the late) Father John Donohue as well as Father Dennis Linehan.

The passing of Father Dave Toolan after a struggle with brain cancer put a gouge in our editorial rock, particularly in the areas of science and theology. He confessed to me in passing one day that he was trying to re-read his book *At Home in the Cosmos* but found it a challenge. The cross-those-*t*'s-and-dot-those-*i*'s Father Jim Torrens, current poetry editor of **America**, was also on the board when I came in 1999. Father George Anderson, who retired last year after a long and distinguished tenure as **America**'s "conscience" on social justice, environmental and other rights causes, was also a valued colleague.

The tireless labors of Father Robert Collins, our persnickety managing editor—truly an editor's editor—make all the difference in the quality of the magazine's pages. And Father Drew Christiansen, who succeeded Father Reese as editor in chief, is a polymath if ever there was one. Not to be overlooked are the chief's assistant, Brother Frank Turnbull, whose day runs about 16 hours (it seems), and our famous author-in-residence and media expert/consultant, Father Jim Martin. Others have come and gone (some, like Father Joe O'Hare, once editor in chief, even came again!). Jim McDermott, Matt Malone and Jim Keane, my youngest Jesuit colleagues, further rounded out our hard-to-beat team. And recent years have ushered in four new lay editors. It has been a time of change, growth and navigating some tricky courses.

Over the past few weeks I have been forced to clean house, as it were, for my successor. As my home away from home, the office is equally prone to the amassment of "stuff." First and foremost, of course, are books, galleys, publishers' catalogs and the like. (Increasingly, publishers now transmit their catalogs electronically.) Photos have to come down and be brought home. Cartons of old permission files (I handled permission requests for years, on the side) should be tossed. A cherished picture and personal note from the late Dame Muriel Spark (a Campion Award honoree some years ago) will be carefully removed and packed up. Old Catholic Book Club brochures need dusting off and re-packaging. And that is just scratching the surface.

Tangibles aside, I take with me special memories: the Jesuit entourage who (to my surprise) showed up at my mother's funeral Mass to concelebrate back in 2002; the 90th anniversary of the magazine right after my arrival and the centennial celebrations in 2009; the mutual respect always on display among staff; the stable of dedicated and talented book reviewers; publishing friends and colleagues.

It's been a great ride, to say the least. Thanks to all who came along!

PATRICIA A. KOSSMANN

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Cover: Group of tourists climb down the steep Nohoch pyramid in Coba, Mexico, on March 29, 2010. Shutterstock.com/Serafino Mozzo

CONTENTS

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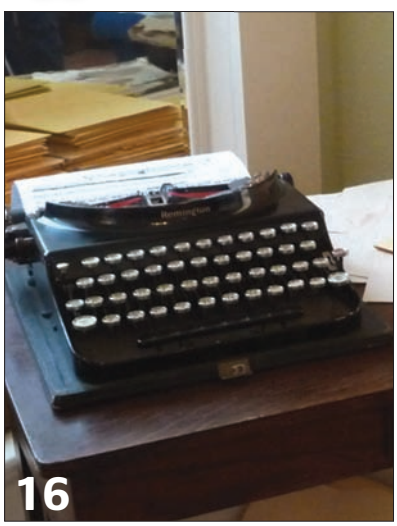

TRAVEL AND PILGRIMAGE

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

A slideshow of homes of **Catholic authors.** Plus, Timothy A. Byrnes, right, discusses his book ***Reverse Mission***, on religious communities and U.S. foreign policy.
All at americamagazine.org.

Citizen Adelson

Ever since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the case of Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010) that corporations could expend unlimited funds to influence elections, observers have been speculating about the myriad ways money would pollute the political process. Sadly, some of the worst fears are already coming true. Put aside the negative advertisements in Iowa aimed at Newt Gingrich, which allowed Mitt Romney's supporters to attack Mr. Gingrich without entangling their candidate in bad publicity. The most troubling development came after the Iowa caucuses, when Sheldon Adelson donated $5 million to a super PAC that supports Mr. Gingrich. Mr. Adelson is a longtime friend of Mr. Gingrich, so the gift was not unexpected. But it seems that one of Mr. Gingrich's infamous historical broadsides may have persuaded his friend to make the donation.

According to reports, Mr. Adelson, a strong supporter of Israel, and of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in particular, is in full agreement with Mr. Gingrich's recent comments on Palestine. "Read the history of those who call themselves Palestinians, and you will hear why Gingrich said recently that the Palestinians are an invented people," said Mr. Adelson. "There are a number of Palestinians who will recognize the truth of this statement."

Mr. Gingrich was pilloried for his statement, and rightly so. Yet now, thanks to the Wild West nature of campaign financing in the United States, he is, in a way, being rewarded for his outrageous remarks. Mr. Adelson is exercising more influence over the Republican debate than any voter from South Carolina or Florida. Just as worrisome, he has a questionable business background (his casino company is under federal investigation) and holds extreme views on foreign policy. Even those who have defended Citizens United must admit that this is a very dangerous scenario.

Does God Listen?

Last month, Tim Tebow, the famously religious quarterback who kneels in prayer before, during and after games, led the Denver Broncos to several wins. During one memorable game, the phenom passed for an astonishing 316 yards in 10 throws. People were quick to link that to the verse from John's Gospel (3:16) that Mr. Tebow had written on his "eye black," the patch of paint under his eyes to cut glare. His victories have made fans (and others) wonder: Is God answering Tim Tebow's prayers? (Mr. Tebow acknowledges that he prays for God's help in the game.)

The answer is: Yes, no, and we don't know. First, yes. God hears everyone's prayers, no matter who you are; just as Jesus says that God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust, and sends the sun to shine on the evil and the good. But does believing in God mean that you will get exactly what you want? No. At first blush, that would seem to be what the Bible promises. Jesus says, "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Clearly, though, believers do not always obtain precisely what they ask for in prayer (think Broncos vs. Patriots on Jan. 14). So why are our prayers—especially those to end suffering—not answered in the ways we would wish? That leads to, We don't know. As the Book of Isaiah says, "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' says the Lord."

Why God does not respond to everyone's prayers as they would like is a tough question to tackle. But in the end, the answer to our prayers is not a touchdown or a Super Bowl victory or a new car or a raise or even good health. The answer is deeper than that, and more lasting. The answer to our prayers is God.

A Catholic Candidate?

Of the two Catholic Republican presidential candidates still standing, Pennsylvania's former senator, Rick Santorum, to a greater degree than other candidates, has constructed his image around an altar boy youth, his coal miner father and his big family of seven children, including the loss of a son born prematurely in 1996. He has gone out of his way to distinguish himself from President John F. Kennedy, who, he says, constructed a "threatening wall" that froze moral convictions out of political discourse. At the same time, although he calls himself "pro family," in November 2011 he questioned the value of the government's helping poor families with food stamps, Medicaid and housing assistance. "Suffering," he said, "if you're a Christian, is part of life."

But there are several gaps between Mr. Santorum and the Catholic Church's social justice teaching. The bishops want citizenship for undocumented immigrants; the former senator says that would invite migrants to break the laws. Pope Benedict XVI deplores the "scandal of glaring inequalities"; Mr. Santorum says, "I have no problem with income inequality." The encyclicals support labor unions; this Catholic candidate would abolish public sector unions. While the bishops have condemned all use of torture, in a televised debate Mr. Santorum endorsed waterboarding and "enhanced interrogation techniques." He has also long championed the death penalty, but now says he is thinking it over.

EDITORIAL

Failure to Protect

"May die 2day," wrote 12-year-old Ramie Marie Grimmer on her Facebook page at 7:50 p.m. on Dec. 5 during a standoff between police and her mother in a welfare office in Laredo, Tex. Two days later the prediction she published using one of the office's computers was realized. Shortly after that her younger brother, Timothy, also died. Both children were shot in the head by their own mother, who then turned the weapon on herself.

Living in a trailer park in one of the nation's poorest counties, the family had been under considerable stress. Rachelle Grimmer begged for food at truck stops. She cooked the family's meals over a campfire outside their trailer because she could not afford gas. Her children did not go to school, bathed outdoors with a garden hose and wore the same clothes day after day. According to neighbors, Rachelle Grimmer had been making her fourth visit—walking five miles, children in tow—to the Laredo social services office, seeking approval for food assistance. When that effort appeared on the verge of failure once again because of improper paperwork, she snapped, took several employees hostage with a .38 revolver and began the seven-hour standoff that would come to such a horrific conclusion.

No one will ever know what combination of crushing poverty, emotional exhaustion or mental illness drove this mother to this unnatural act. In the aftermath of this tragedy, procedures regarding how family aid is administered are under review in Texas and should perhaps be reviewed elsewhere around the country as well. Are public aid offices making it too hard for people, during this time of profound economic dislocation, to find the help they need? Have mental health services been cut too thin by government downsizing? How was it that this frustrated and disturbed woman was unable to get through the application process for food stamps but apparently had little trouble acquiring the handgun she used to kill her family?

One can only hope that institutional reassessments lead to procedural reforms that can prevent a tragedy like this from happening again. But the suffering and loss of these children, and others like them across the country, demand a broader examination of national conscience. More reports of such incomprehensible violence against children at the hands of their own parents and caregivers continued to make headlines in the weeks after Ramie Marie's death. Are these distressing times driving some already disturbed parents to the breaking point?

There is reason to be concerned. New York police report that the number of child murder victims jumped from seven in 2009 to 24 in 2010. A limited study of 74 U.S. counties in four states conducted by the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh last year found a 65 percent increase between 2007 and 2009 in "shaken baby" cases and other brain injuries resulting from the physical abuse of children. Of the 422 cases tracked, 69 resulted in death.

A quick look at the national numbers of child injuries and mortality resulting from physical abuse (distinct from sexual abuse) or neglect should be a guide. If the numbers are going up dramatically, then it may be time to dispense with all the political prattle about balancing budgets and the proper role of government. If children are dying because government outreach, supervision and intervention programs meant to protect them are being reduced or eliminated, then the rhetorical disputes must end, and the programs must be restored.

Unfortunately the data that could provide a reliable indicator of such a crisis may not be readily available. A study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that children's deaths from abuse or neglect may be dramatically underreported in the United States. According to the G.A.O., the 1,770 maltreatment deaths recorded by the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System in 2009 represent a 50 to 60 percent undercount. Nearly half of the states that participated in the system include only data reported by child welfare agencies. But according to the G.A.O., "not all children who die from maltreatment have had contact with these agencies."

Accurate figures on the problem of violence against children is only a starting point, but it will be difficult to justify restoring or salvaging critical intervention programs if the extent of the crisis is not known and demonstrable. It is of course criminal and repugnant that parents assault or neglect their children. But it is also shameful to allow a well-known social pathology to metastasize during a short-term economic downturn because the larger society prefers to continue ideological skirmishes rather than assume the responsibility to protect the innocent and defenseless. It is the least that is owed to Ramie Marie Grimmer, by all accounts a bright and likable child who had a whole, wonderful life ahead of her.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Anti-Poverty Programs Remain Likely Targets in 2012


Three-year-old Robert Wells and his dad, Kenneth, were among about 45 people receiving emergency food packages at St. Anthony of Padua Church in northeast Washington on Nov. 9.

Several legislative challenges to crucial domestic and international anti-poverty programs were turned back in 2011, but the same programs will probably require defending again in 2012. That is the word from Bread for the World's president, the Rev. David Beckmann, as his anti-hunger organization launched its annual congressional lobbying campaign, called Offering of Letters, on Jan. 17.

Beckmann said "huge" victories in 2011 were worth celebrating: "I'm just thunderstruck that we managed to get through 2011 without any major cuts to programs focused on poor and hungry people in the United States and around the world." He attributed that success to the Circle of Protection, a multifaith alliance that included the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Council of Churches, the National Association of Evangelicals and many more.

John Carr, the executive director of the U.S.C.C.B.'s Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, likewise noted some underappreciated legislative achievements "in a difficult environment." Perhaps most notable among them was a provision in the debt ceiling agreement that exempted low-income entitlement programs like Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program from automatic budget cuts in 2013.

In the budget debates last year, according to Beckmann, church groups first raised the alarm about an "overall attack on all programs focused on poor people." The message the Circle of Protection took to Congress and President Obama was simple: there should be better ways to reduce the federal deficit than "taking food aid from desperate people and W.I.C. from

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Bishops Cheer High Court Decision

In a groundbreaking decision that had been anticipated by religious bodies across the country, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on Jan. 11 that a "ministerial exception," a concept developed in lower courts but only now endorsed by the Supreme Court, means that the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of religion shields churches from federal laws meant to end employment discrimination.

"The interest of society in the enforcement of employment discrimination statutes is undoubtedly important," Chief Justice John Roberts Jr. wrote for the court. "But so too is the interest of religious groups in choosing who will preach their beliefs, teach their faith and carry out their mission." Roberts said allowing anti-discrimination lawsuits against religious organizations could force churches to employ religious leaders they no longer want.

"Such action interferes with the internal governance of the church, depriving the church of control over the selection of those who will personify its beliefs," Roberts said. "By imposing an unwanted minister, the state infringes the Free Exercise Clause, which protects a religious group's right to shape its own faith and mission through its appointments."

In a concurring brief, Justice Samuel Alito, joined by Justice Elena Kagan, said the definition of who is a "minister" should always be left to the faith group. "The mere adjudication of such questions would pose grave problems for religious autonomy," Alito wrote.

"The Supreme Court decision marks a victory for religious liberty and the U.S. Constitution," said Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty. "This decision makes resoundingly clear the historical and constitutional

hungry kids." Congress and the president eventually agreed, settling on a deficit reduction strategy that preserved anti-poverty programs. But 2011 successes cannot be taken for granted. "The future looks tougher," Carr said.

According to Beckmann, many of the same programs—support for the unemployed, nutrition programs for U.S. children and food relief for the hungry around the world—will again fall into legislative crosshairs.

Beckmann is especially concerned about possible foreign aid cuts. He said U.S. aid was instrumental in essentially halting the AIDS pandemic last year and in improving agricultural production around the world. Much of that progress could be lost in 2012.

"We need to speak up in 2012 and say, whatever you do about military spending, do not cut effective assistance to African farmers," said Beckmann. "In the end, I think the prophets are clear that our security does not depend on iron chariots; it depends on right worship and doing right by the poor."

Looking to next year, Carr worried that "the wall that protects essential low-income programs could be breached." He called the near silence on poverty among the current crop of presidential candidates "ominous."

"In all the partisan crossfire and political posturing, it's quite likely that the poor will be ignored or worse," he said. "When resources are scarce or leadership is missing, very often the poor pay the price in terms of the budget and other choices."

For his part, Beckmann remains optimistic. "This is not rocket science," he said. Other countries are succeeding today in reducing poverty, just as the United States has done in the past. "We've got to have organized give-a-damn," said Beckmann, "and we're not going to have organized give-a-damn again unless a lot of Catholics and Protestants are moved by the Holy Spirit to insist on getting our country to get serious about poverty again.

"If that happens," he said, "I think we could see very rapid progress against poverty and hunger in the United States and around the world."

importance of keeping internal church affairs off limits to the government—because whoever chooses the minister chooses the message."

Critics of the decision worry that it might mean whistle-blowers within church institutions on issues like the sexual abuse of children could be terminated without recourse.

The case came before the court after the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission sued the Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School of Redford, Mich., on behalf of a terminated employee, Cheryl Perich. Returning to work after a sick leave, Perich discovered that the school was unwilling to rehire her. The Michigan E.E.O.C. took up her case under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

At the school her role was mostly that of a secular teacher, but she taught one religion class and as a "called teacher" was considered a minister of the church. That last status was crucial to the court's ruling. Had she not been considered a minister or had she not taught at least one religion class, it is not clear that would have applied.

The apparent precedent may not prove as far-reaching as the U.S. bishops and other U.S. religious leaders hope. According to some court watchers, the decision was a narrow one, with Roberts refusing to extend the ministerial exception to other types of lawsuits that religious employees might bring against their employers.

A teacher leads students in prayer before class at Pope John Paul II school in Wilmington, Del.

Human Rights Crisis In Pakistan

The Asian Human Rights Commission reports that Pakistan's blasphemy law continues to claim victims, while outrages against human rights tolerated by the government and court system include the forced conversion of almost 2,000 Hindu and Christian girls, many of whom were kidnapped and raped. At least 161 people were indicted and nine were killed in extrajudicial executions in 2011 because of accusations of blasphemy that "are false in 95 percent of cases." The commission documented the killing of 18 human rights activists and 16 journalists last year. Among the 2011 victims were Punjab's Governor Salman Taseer and the federal minister for minorities, Shabhaz Bhatti. These "murders [were] committed by religious extremist groups infiltrated in the police force," according to the commission.

Climate Change Impact On Ethiopia

"Land degradation and climate change are serious realities in Ethiopia," according to Lane Bunkers of Catholic Relief Services. A persistent drought is forcing farmers to abandon traditional rain-reliant practices. Recalling when Ethiopian regimes in the 1970s and 1980s either did not have the capacity or the political will to face a series of famines, the Rev. Hailegebriel Meleku, deputy secretary general of the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat, said the country is now better poised to address its humanitarian problems, in part because church bodies have been mobilized during recent crises. Father Meleku said the country's leaders, in partnership with neighboring governments, must begin to find new ways to address the adverse effects of climate change on vulnerable communities. Ethiopia as a whole has escaped the serious food shortages that have devastated large parts of neighboring Somalia. Some Ethiopians, however, have had limited access to food, posing a serious challenge to the country's leaders, Father Meleku said.

Spread the Wealth?

While economic growth in Latin America continues at an impressive pace, many of its poorest citizens complain the benefits of growth have passed them by. Little overall progress will be made in the region unless underlying poverty and inequality are addressed, said Archbishop Pedro Barreto Jimeno of Peru, who heads the social justice commission of the Latin American bishops' council, or Celam. Countries that are rich in natural resources must ensure that the economic benefits of industries such as mining, oil and gas reach people who still lack basic services, Archbishop Barreto said, repeating a call for a new economic model based on the social doctrine of the church. That model would include more dialogue among government leaders, industry executives and communities, Archbishop Barreto said, about such large development projects as mines, oil drilling, dams and highways that would displace local residents or have a significant impact on the environment—conflicts that are only going to grow more frequent as the region's expanding economies seek more power from hydroelectric resources.

From CNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

A Syrian refugee in Turkey

The millions of **refugees and migrants** in the world are not numbers but "men and women, young and old, who are looking for a place they can live in peace," Pope Benedict XVI said on Jan. 15. ✦ On Jan. 8, the **Maryknoll Sisters**, the first U.S.-based congregation of women religious dedicated to foreign missions, marked its 100th anniversary with a special Mass by New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan at its world headquarters in Ossining, N.Y. ✦ The Rev. Marco Aurelio Lorenzo, a Honduran priest known for human rights and environmental advocacy, said he and two of his brothers were **beaten by police** the day after Christmas during a trip to visit their parents. ✦ Just days before authorities searched church offices in four dioceses, Belgium's Catholic bishops pledged a **"culture of vigilance"** against future sexual abuse by priests and said guilty clergy must compensate their victims even if their crimes are no longer punishable by law. ✦ Catholic bishops in Texas applauded a federal appeals court decision on Jan. 11 that allows the state to require **abortion providers** to offer women the opportunity to view the ultrasound images of their unborn children.

SMALL TOWN SEEKS PARISH PRIEST.

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KYLE T. KRAMER

On the Hunt

Although I was a vegetarian for years, my family's attempt to eat more locally raised and sustainable food led us toward occasional meat-eating—chicken, beef, bison and pork raised on our farm or by neighbors. As part of this omnivory, I have spent several years contemplating whether I might also take up deer hunting.

In theory at least, hunting is a skill I want to cultivate in order to keep my family (and others) fed, especially if any link in the complex and vulnerable food supply chain should ever falter. I suppose some primal "provider" instinct still abides deep in my DNA. From a broader ecological perspective, without wolves as natural predators, deer become so populous that both the local ecosystem and the herd suffer in the absence of human harvesting. And in terms of global energy economics, eating venison shot on our farm is about as low-carbon as food gets, compared to the expense, labor and energy required to raise domesticated livestock, even with humane and organic methods.

Despite my convictions about the value of hunting, my inner vegetarian was ambivalent, even after I set aside the stereotypical parody of hunters as testosterone-fueled, big-truck-driving, red-state rural rednecks. Although I have butchered our farm-raised chickens, I still have qualms about taking the life of any animal. Most important, our young daughters lamented the idea of Papa shooting Bambi, and I hesitated to become in their eyes a man capable of such violence, even in the name of providing family sustenance. But with fear and trembling, this year I finally decided to hunt.

Over the dozen years I have lived on this farm, I have spent much time in the woods. Normally, I go there to work: cutting timber or firewood, gathering nuts, clearing trails. I am in charge of the task and the time frame. When I came to hunt, however, the equation changed completely. I had to be still and quiet and utterly aware of any noise or movement. I paid attention to game trails, buck scrapes and other signs of which I had been oblivious for years. I became mindful of how the wind carried my own creaturely scent. I watched the sun rise or fall through the leafless trees. Twice I witnessed great horned owls kite silently from their perch in a shadowy flap of wings. I watched, I listened, and I waited, senses on full alert.

I gave thanks, asked forgiveness and pulled the trigger.

After a few early morning and late afternoon hunts, I finally saw a doe, feeding alone near dusk on the red clover in one of our hayfields. My heart pounding, I clicked off the safety and held the deer in the scope crosshairs until I had a clear, 60-yard broadside shot: a clean kill, I hoped. Almost overwhelmed by the difficulty of extinguishing another life, I gave thanks, asked forgiveness and pulled the trigger. The shot hit home. The doe ran 20 yards and fell.

In *The Second Coming*, the Catholic writer Walker Percy describes his novel's protagonist, Will Barrett, stumbling around in a fog of wealth and social convention. He is alienated and distracted, unable to be present to himself or others. I can relate to Will Barrett; I often feel similarly insulated and anesthetized. Whether from stress, self-absorption or the endless allure of technology, consumer goods and packaged entertainment, I tend to forget my physical reality as a creature of nature and my spiritual reality as beloved of God—and in both, my deep connection to the world and to others. I know I am not alone in this, and I likewise know that such abstraction makes possible much of the abuse and atrocities committed against people and the planet.

Hunting, however, showed me one way to tear away the scrim between myself and the wonderful, ambiguous, God-soaked world around me. Feeling part of the utter aliveness of the woods and its creatures, and even dealing death within that aliveness—both felt compellingly real.

I rarely encounter the sacred as vividly when sitting in a church pew as I do when sitting in the woods. I have often blamed the church for this, and not without reason, considering its checkered history (and present) and its sometimes lackluster liturgies. But I suspect that Gandhi was right, that the change I want to see must begin in my own heart and habits. I experienced the woods differently only when I came to them in a new way. What if I attended Mass with similar watchfulness and expectation, longing for God as the deer longs for running streams?

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

An Iban warrior of Sarawak poses with tourists at the Rainforest World Music Festival 2009 on the Island of Borneo.

PHOTO: WILLIV / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The Ethical Traveler

How to escape the tourist trap

BY TIM PADGETT

Confiteor: I am an Ugly American. Never mind that I am a bilingual foreign correspondent for a national newsmagazine. There have been moments abroad, more than I care to admit, when I have acted as boorishly as one of those gringos in a Hawaiian shirt screaming at a foreign waiter for a cheeseburger.

Or a Coke—which is what I thought I ordered at the Guatemala airport one morning when I asked for a *refresco*. The waitress instead brought me some sort of pungent punch. So in good Ugly American style I haughtily complained about third world disregard for service—I muttered something like, "Even when we learn the language it doesn't do us much

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good"—made the woman feel rotten and ran to catch my plane. Up in the air, a Guatemalan man sitting next to me asked for a *gaseosa*, and the flight attendant gave him a Coke. That is when I realized I had been using the wrong word (at least in this part of Central America) for "soft drink."

I was ashamed, and not only because I had mistreated the Guatemalan waitress. I had also insulted the memory of another woman, a fictional character who has served as a piece of my traveler's conscience since I first saw the 1979 movie "Breaking Away."

You do not have to be from Indiana, as I am, to adore that film, especially the scene in which the working-class Hoosier mother shows off the U.S. passport she uses when she writes checks at the grocery store. She has never used it for travel abroad, but just owning one lets her dream about it. I always want to reach into the screen and hug that woman, because she is such a loving refutation of the heartland stereotype. Contrary to what snobs on either U.S. coast assume about Midwesterners, she genuinely wants to see the world beyond her borders, and when she does she will most likely be an ambassador Americans can be proud of. She is a valuable reminder that the people we so often peg as Ugly American material can just as often prove to be sophisticated travelers. And vice versa. I have seen as many Beltway-trained diplomats as I have oafs from Peoria insult foreign hotel receptionists or demand ketchup for their *ceviche*. I have watched New Yorkers, who never tire of saying they live in the planet's most cosmopolitan city, commit as many cultural insensitivities from Tijuana to Tierra del Fuego as Texans have perpetrated.

The Conscientious American

But regardless of which Americans were being ugly, we could get away with it until now because we were, well, Americans, citizens of a superpower whose global hegemony in the late 20th century resembled England's in the early 20th century, when the British traveled a world they essentially owned. That is changing in the early 21st century. America's version of "A Room With a View," the world that we ourselves felt we owned, has less patience for the Ugly American today because the United States has less clout. I see this increasingly across the territory I cover, Latin America, where emerging giants like Brazil have become more independent counterbalances to *yanqui* supremacy. When the world does not see United States at its most powerful anymore, it is not as willing to indulge Americans at their most boorish.

Simply put, we have to learn to be better world travelers. That is particularly true in the developing world, which is suddenly developing more rapidly than we had anticipated—like the so-called BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China). These are nations we will increasingly have to engage as equals as this century progresses. This could turn out to be something of a spiritual challenge as well. On visits to the third world, Americans have always packed a bit of missionary condescension along with their sunblock and Imodium. But now we will need more of the kind of guest humility that Jesus taught his followers to carry with them, and that Christian travelers, starting with Peter and Paul, have been expected to exemplify these past two millennia.

Travelers are true, spontaneous visitors, guests who mingle with their hosts, eat their foods—perhaps learn their words for 'soft drink.'

As the Catholic author G. K. Chesteron wrote, "The traveler sees what he sees, the tourist sees what he has come to see." It is one of life's most important maxims: Be a traveler, not a tourist, especially when you are visiting countries whose governments, economies and institutions may not be as advanced as yours and whose citizens are often, as a result, more self-conscious and sensitive about foreigners' opinions. Travelers are true, spontaneous visitors, guests who mingle with their hosts, eat their foods—perhaps learn their words for soft drink. Tourists are gawkers at a zoo, robotically boarding buses and checking off sights but rarely if ever absorbing the places they are visiting and the people who inhabit them.

Now, before package-tour operators get angry at me, let me emphasize that I am not disparaging that genre of travel. (In the age of discount-travel Web sites, however, I am less sympathetic to the argument that regimented itineraries are all that many people can afford.) In most cases you can be on a package vacation, with its bus tours and pre-paid hotel meals, and still find time to explore its destinations yourself. What I am lamenting is the tourist mind-set we bring to developing regions like Latin America, particularly our obsession with cruises and all-inclusive resorts, whose only moments beyond the Tiki bar and the soft-serve ice cream dispenser are the excursion to Chichén Itzá and the swim-with-the-dolphins attraction.

And that goes for travel in other developing regions, including safaris in Africa (I've been on one and loved it, but was struck that many tourists seemed more respectful of

lions and rhinos than of the Masai and Kikuyu) and sightseeing in the Holy Land. Especially in the Holy Land. I think it is great when priests and rabbis lead their congregations on tours of Israel and Palestine. But if you are the sort of person of faith who wants to see where Moses and Jesus spoke to God thousands of years ago but who is not interested in speaking with the flesh-and-blood human beings who live there today—including the Muslims we simply must come to understand better in this century—then I guess we have different ideas about the purpose of faith and travel.

En la Cantina

I am a journalist and therefore a realist, so I do not believe that striking up a conversation with locals in the rain forest will save the world. But I do believe it helps to create more mutual goodwill than merely zip-lining over the rain forest does. Toward that end, it has always befuddled me that Americans will go to neighborhood pubs in England and out-of-the-way bistros in France but not the equally inviting cantinas of Mexico. These offer the same sort of convivial refuge where you can inhale the country's *manera de ser*—its way of being—but over a snifter of tequila instead of a pint of stout or a glass of Bordeaux.

The next time you are in Mexico, please try something too few visitors do. One day, instead of going to Señor Frog's or another of the prefabricated "authentic" chain restaurants, ask your concierge to recommend a good local cantina. Head there around 3:00 p.m., when much of the country still eats its long lunch, *la comida*. (Note: as someone who has covered the drug war for 22 years, I would advise you to pay attention to the State Department's advisories about which parts of Mexico to avoid, particularly in the violent northern border region. But I can also tell you that cantinas are generally safe places to frequent.)

Order a *tequila reposada* (aged) with the accompanying glass of *sangrita*, spicy tomato juice. (Oh, and if you want a soft drink, *refresco* is the word to use in Mexico.) Have some *queso fundido con chistorra* (cheese and Spanish sausage) and a *sopa Azteca* (tortilla soup). Follow that with some *tacos al pastor* (shepherd's tacos) or *huachinango* (red snapper) or *pollo en mole* (chicken in a heavenly chocolate-and-spices sauce). Pay one of the guitar trios that often wander cantinas to serenade you with a tune like "Esta tarde vi llover." Enjoy a *tres leches* (milk cake) for dessert, then have the waiter bring you a set of dominoes and play a few games while keeping your tequilas in the drink holsters you usually find on the table legs.

Most important, try to talk to someone, even if it is just the waiter. If you do not speak Spanish, this is a good way to start learning. If you do not drink too much tequila, the afternoon will likely linger in the memory as long as, if not longer than, the bus tour out to the Teotihuacán pyramids

will. If you are a business traveler, this is the sort of time investment that can only help make you a better person-to-person dealmaker abroad.

What is more, it is not that hard. It ought to be easier for those of us from places like Indiana, where we supposedly value the unpretentious touch that facilitates interaction across people's thresholds. I need only point to my aunt, who at age 60 had never been abroad but jumped at the chance to go to my wedding in Venezuela. On her first day there she sat down with my in-laws, none of whom spoke English, and learned a Spanish card game as if she had been globetrotting her whole life. Looking back on my career, I think one of my assets has been an ability, or willingness, to chat up farmers as well as presidents and elicit their thoughts about everything from federal elections to local ecology. I suspect growing up in Middle America has made me a better journalist in Mesoamerica.

Two things I do not bring into these people's homes, cantinas and offices are my religion and my politics. I mention this only because too often I have seen American travelers assert their faith and philosophies in the developing world in ways they rarely do in developed regions like Europe. It is part of what I call the "our little brown brothers" syndrome, a well-intentioned but dreadfully executed urge to spread a message of salvation or social justice. Liberals are just as prone to this as are conservatives: too many U.S. and European "sandalistas" descend on Latin American countries run by left-wing governments as if they were revolutionary resorts. Yet any kind of tourist "solidarity" with one faction of a country simply insults the other faction and often betrays an ignorance of the complexities of that nation's internal disputes.

Ditto regarding missionary tourism. I have the highest regard for anyone whose faith inspires them to take a week's vacation to build houses or schools or potable water systems in poor regions like Central America. But as a journalist and a Catholic who has lived and worked in these countries, I am convinced that charity and evangelization are a bad and sometimes dangerous mix. Let the charity work do the evangelizing, because coming on too strong with the latter simply tends to cheapen the former in the eyes of most locals. I admire Catholic Relief Services in this regard. The Sudanese government looked ridiculous last year when it expelled C.R.S. from Darfur for supposedly trying to convert Muslims, because everyone knows that is not how C.R.S. operates. Its non-evangelism is an example for Catholic travelers as well.

I am not completely certain what a "Catholic traveler" should be. (I could cite Marco Polo, who seems an avatar of the travel tenets I have laid out here.) But Catholics have a special obligation to consider Chesterton's admonition that we shake hands with the places we visit and not just snap their pictures. One of the things that distinguishes Catholicism—a precept that drew converts like me and Chesterton to it—is its rich contemplation of Jesus' human as well as divine nature. Finding divinity in humanity is a spiritual exercise we are expected to undertake not just at home but also abroad. Read Chesteron's travel writings, especially *What I Saw in America* (1922), and you meet not just a wandering Englishman but a wondering Catholic, living his faith out of a suitcase, engaging everyone from New York businessmen to rural Oklahomans.

Although the British Empire was still in full swing, Chesteron took pains not to be an Ugly Brit. Were he alive today, he would appreciate developments like eco-tourism. It is one of the many ways (if done right) that we can avoid the environmental plunder of destinations from Bolivia to Burma. This style of tourism can also put us in closer touch with people in locally owned lodging, shops and restaurants.

These days the Ugly American is hardly alone. If you are a U.S. hotel worker or taxi driver, you have probably encountered the rude, loud, euro-waving tourists we could just as easily call Ugly Italians, Germans or French. And all I need to do is visit a Miami mall to find the Western Hemisphere's affluent new Touristazilla, the Ugly Brazilian; I have even heard a few of them get testy with waiters who don't know what a *Guaraná* is. That is Brazil's favorite soft drink. You should order one, politely, when you visit. A

Writing Home

Literary pilgrimages to the homes of Catholic authors

BY KERRY WEBER

The woman approaching Andalusia was clearly emotional. Craig Amason could see her from behind the screen door of the 19th-century, white-painted home of Flannery O'Connor, the Southern fiction writer. She walked up the steps and asked Mr. Amason if she could enter. As executive director of the Flannery O'Connor—Andalusia foundation in Milledgeville, Ga., Mr. Amason was used to welcoming visitors. "Of course," he answered, although he was not prepared for the woman's next question.

Andalusia, Flannery O'Connor's home in Milledgeville, Ga.

"Should I take off my shoes?" she asked.

Mr. Amason laughed, "Well, no; I don't take mine off." So the woman stepped inside, shoes and all, and looked around with reverence.

Then she turned to Mr. Amason and said, "I'm Catholic because of Flannery O'Connor."

The woman was one of the more than 5,000 visitors who come through the door of Andalusia each year. And while not every visitor arrives with a conversion story, many feel a similar pull to O'Connor's home after reading her work. The home has been open to the public since 2004, but visitors started arriving long before that. Enthusiastic readers and curious passers-by often jumped the fence that surrounded the property and wandered the grounds, said Mr. Amason. Opening the house to the public allowed for more legitimate—and informative—visits to the home, which now offers tours to a global cast of individuals ranging from senior citizens in book clubs to teenagers covered in piercings and tattoos. O'Connor's writing speaks to them all.

"At least once a year," said Mr. Amason, "we watch people weep while standing at the corner of Flannery O'Connor's bedroom." A particularly burly man once stood over the guestbook with tears streaming down his face. "He said, 'I'm crying like a baby; this is embarrassing, but it's so meaningful,'" Mr. Amason recalled. "I told him it happens all the time."

Which might lead one to wonder: Why? Visiting the home of a writer is, in some ways, an illogical adventure. Writers offer readers hundreds of pages of work to digest, and collections of letters and essays often allow even deeper insight. Is anything to be gained from seeing a chair in which a writer once sat? The question has been a popular one of late, and the recent work of several authors seeks to answer it. *Seeds: One Man's Serendipitous Journey to Find the Trees That Inspired Famous American Writers From Faulkner to Kerouac, Welty to Wharton,* by Richard Horan, and *A Skeptic's Guide to Writers' Houses,* by Anne Trubek, explore the author-reader connection from different viewpoints. And the Web site writershouses.com chronicles visits to dozens of writers' homes in the United States and abroad.

Of course, not every visitor to a writer's home is inspired purely by the author's work. Some come looking for a break from a long drive, a way to kill time or just find a bathroom. As April Bernard lamented in a recent essay in The New York Review of Books, too many people seem to believe that visiting a house is a quick and easy way to familiarize oneself with an author and serves as "a substitute for reading the work." But for many, such a journey can supplement love for an author and his or her works. Crowds continue to flock to authors' homes around the world, and for many readers, a

PHOTO: COURTESY OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR-ANDALUSIA FOUNDATION, INC

KERRY WEBER *is an associate editor of* ***America.***

Replica of Margaret Mitchell's writing desk, Atlanta, Ga.

visit to an author's home is a kind of pilgrimage.

"It's a very poignant scene when you look into that bedroom and see those spartan conditions and know what O'Connor was up against, as far as coping with lupus, and know what incredible stories were produced in that room," Mr. Amason says of Andalusia. The sense of place in O'Connor's fiction and in her life are closely intertwined, which leaves many visitors to her home feeling as though they have viewed a scene from one of her stories. "This is not just a place where an author penned her fiction, it's a place that very clearly inspired so much of that fiction," says Mr. Amason. He says visitors see the hayloft and think of the story "Good Country People"; they see the lines of trees and think of her many stories in which trees symbolize a boundary between good and evil. "It's not just a house," he says. "It's a landscape."

Placing Merton, Mitchell and Greene

That connection between place and person is equally present at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Ky., once home to the writer and Trappist monk Thomas Merton. Approximately 4,600 retreatants each year visit the abbey. Many have a chance to meet Brother Paul Quenon, now a poet and a cook at the abbey, for whom Thomas Merton served as novice master. Brother Quenon also assists with occasional retreats for scholars who attend a nearby Thomas Merton conference. During their visit he takes the group to Merton's hermitage, a spot normally off limits to visitors. The group has a discussion, and Brother Quenon reads to them from Merton's private journals. But for many, simply being in Merton's space is enough. "The hermitage speaks for itself," Brother Quenon says. "I could sit down and read the phone book and they'd still be thrilled."

Many of the retreatants already have read much of Merton's work and have seen images of the monastery, and so to actually visit is to "step into something they're prepared for and yet also to step into another realm of experience," Brother Quenon said. He knows the feeling too. He once made a pilgrimage to Prades, France, where Merton was born. While there, he read passages from Merton's writings about the town and felt they took on a different meaning.

Merton's writing, he said, has a way of touching people's

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ATLANTA HISTORY CENTER

souls, which in turn draws them to a place that inspired him. "People are very lonely out there," Brother Quenon said. "It's part of the human condition. They find a way of handling it in the writing of Thomas Merton. So when they come here, they often say they feel like they're coming home. It gives them a place for self-understanding. Then they come here and the picture gets filled out. There are over 150 years of prayer that have soaked into our walls."

Still, Gethsemani differs from other writers' homes in that it is not a shrine to the writer or a museum, but a living monastery. There is no statue or plaque set up to honor Merton and no special marker for his grave. "He remains just one of the monks," Brother Quenon says, "which is what he came here to be."

While many are drawn to Gethsemani by the breadth and depth of Merton's works, a single book draws 1,000 visitors a day to another author's former home in Atlanta, Ga. The novelist Margaret Mitchell was baptised a Catholic, and although her personal faith is not well documented, the impact of her most famous work, *Gone With the Wind*, is more easily discernible.

Joanna Arrieta, director of historic houses for the Atlanta History Center and Margaret Mitchell House, said that visitors arrive at Mitchell's former apartment in Atlanta, Ga., with "a kaleidoscope of different motivations." Many hope to experience the city that inspired Mitchell and view it through her own window. Ms. Arrieta said a young man from Ukraine arrived with a copy of *Gone With the Wind* that he had read during the cold war; he said he had found comfort in Scarlett's role as a survivor. Another group arrived from Japan and said the story had inspired them during the Allied occupation of their country.

The small apartment in the city's downtown offers visitors a chance to see the spot where Mitchell lived for seven years and wrote most of her famous novel. Mitchell "grew up with all the oral histories of days gone by and she was really applying that and the history" as she wrote, Arrieta said.

But not all writers are so closely associated with one place. A visit to the hometown of Graham Greene, a Catholic convert and author known for his worldly travels, might seem counterintuitive, for example. But David Pearce, a founding trustee of the Graham Greene Birthplace Trust and the former director of the Graham Greene Festival in Berkhamsted, England, argues that to truly know Greene, one must understand the hometown he left but never really left behind.

Mr. Pearce taught for 34 years at Berkhamsted School, which Greene attended and at which Greene's father had served as headmaster. David Pearce once met Greene when the author returned as an adult for a visit to the Berkhamsted School library. This small English town is the place where Greene competed with his siblings and cousins and was mocked by schoolmates for being the headmaster's son, but he eventually embraced the town. This contrast is typical of Greene, Mr. Pearce said, "He belonged nowhere and was interested in everything."

Though the school has changed in some ways—it now has central heating and carpeting—Mr. Pearce says visitors can see many of the aspects with which Graham would have been familiar. "You can see around here exactly the scenes that he knew and that he responded to," Mr. Pearce said, including a tree in the quad and the chapel in the school and the green baize door dividing the headmaster's quarters from the pupils.

"The people who come find that Graham lives here just as much as people find Charles Dickens in London these days," Mr. Pearce said. "You can't separate the place from the writer."

Mr. Pearce said that Greene, while living in his hometown, gained a genuine "understanding and distrust of institutions and he established the belief [that] you've got to test everything for yourself." Mr. Pearce argues that this viewpoint also influenced the author's faith and that the church "provided Greene with a sort of ultimate theory of how one should live." Mr. Pearce added: "And if one couldn't manage to do it, at least you knew how you should do it. One thinks of religion as being totally binding, and Graham would not be bound by anything but his own judgments, but he could not get away from the tenets of Catholicism."

Mr. Pearce said he appreciates Graham Greene's many works and also the community of Greene enthusiasts that has formed because of them. Several of Greene's family members have attended and supported the festival in Berkhamsted. Hundreds of international visitors also attend the festival, which provides a special kind of camaraderie. "I'm just a provincial old schoolmaster," he said, laughing, "but the whole world comes to me, all because of Graham." A

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Abbey of Gethsemani, Trappist, Ky.
www.monks.org
For retreat information or reservations:
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Margaret Mitchell House, Atlanta, Ga.
www.margaretmitchellhouse.com
Phone: (404) 814-4000

Graham Greene Birthplace Trust
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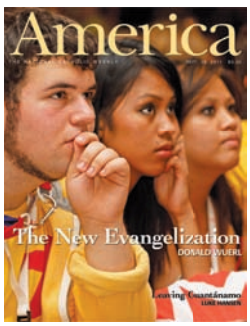

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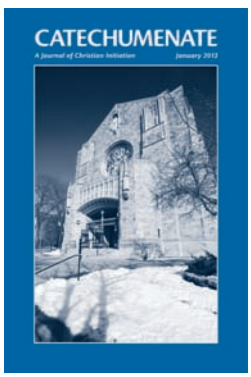

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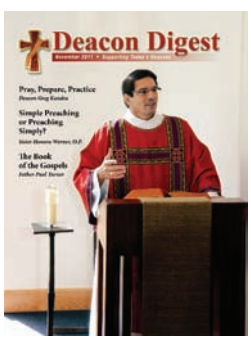

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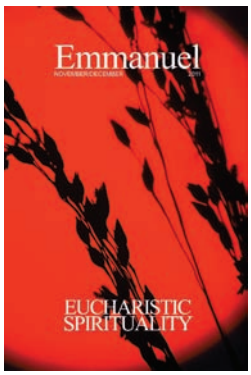

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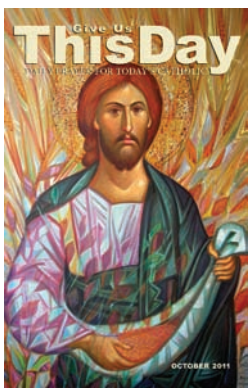

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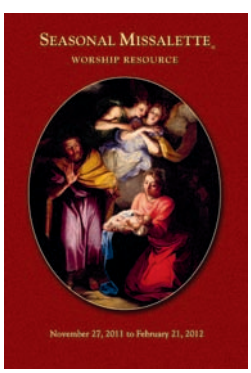

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FILM | MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY

FAMILY CIRCLES

Alexander Payne's 'The Descendants'

The director Alexander Payne is known for black comedies featuring dazed and confused male protagonists. Think of Matthew Broderick in "Election" or Paul Giamatti and Thomas Haden Church in "Sideways." Yet he deserves equal recognition for his sensitive adaptations of novels. **The Descendants,** based on a book of the same name by Kaui Hart Hemmings, is Payne's fourth film adaptation, and a sign that his reading list is growing in interesting directions.

Hemmings is not a well-known author, and perhaps that is to Payne's advantage. There are no rabid fans to dissect the differences between film and text. Still, adaptation is a difficult art, and Payne has managed to find books that work nicely on screen, with few of the portentous voice-overs that tend to spoil films about books. In *The Descendants,* Payne, a graduate of the Jesuit high school Creighton Prep in Omaha, has found source material that builds upon his oeuvre without replicating it. He brings us another middle-aged man at loose ends, but one who seems more grown up than his predecessors.

George Clooney has already generated significant Oscar talk for his lead role, but the entire cast is superb, with Robert Forster, Beau Bridges and Judy Greer deserving special mention. It is unfortunate that the Academy does not recognize the acting of an ensemble cast. Clooney and company prove that great performances do not emerge from a vacuum.

"The Descendants" is imbued with more pathos than the typical Payne film. Clooney plays Matt King, the paterfamilias of a family at a crossroads. His wife, Elizabeth (Patricia Hastie), lies in a coma after crashing during a boat race. For the first time in a long time, he must learn how to be a father to his two daughters. He must also contend with an irascible father-in-law (Forster), who holds him partially responsible for Elizabeth's accident, and friends who press him for updates on his wife's condition. Oh, and he belatedly discovers that Elizabeth was having an affair at the time of the crash.

In another Payne film, such a confluence of events might send the male protagonist into a frenzy of frustration. Yet Matt is oddly subdued. When he first hears about his wife's affair from his daughter, Alexandra (Shailene Woodley), he does not yell or scream but sprints out the door to the house of two close friends. His heated interrogation of the couple (what did they know and when?) is a rare outburst. Mostly, Matt holds it together.

Over the course of the film, Matt approaches a kind of maturity that has long eluded him. He declines to dispute his father-in-law's claim that Elizabeth was a "devout wife," graciously allowing him to hold onto this piece of fiction as he watches his daughter slowly fade away. When Alexandra's spacey friend, Sid (Nick Krause), laughs at her grandmother's dementia, Matt does not respond with

George Clooney, Nick Krause, Shailene Woodley and Amara Miller in "The Descendants"

anger. It is left to his father-in-law to (literally) punch Sid in the nose. Matt understands that even at 17, Sid is just a kid. At first, Matt simply seems afraid of confrontation, but his exercise of restraint ultimately comes across as sensible, even wise.

It is tempting to attribute Matt's laid-back attitude to his place of residence: the islands of Hawaii. Yet as he explains at the start of the film, the residents of Hawaii do not live in a utopian paradise. Cool trade winds and gorgeous beaches do not exempt one from the normal disappointments and tragedies of life. Matt, a less-than-happy lawyer whose relationship with Elizabeth was fraying long before her affair, knows this better than most.

Even though the story is told from the point of view of a "haole," the film's portrayal of Hawaiian life feels convincing. (It certainly does a better job than "Forgetting Sarah Marshall," which rarely left the Hawaiian resort.) There are the little details: Clooney's slightly shaggy mane; executives wearing aloha shirts instead of suits; a reference to Punahou School. What the film does best, though, is impart the importance of family in the Hawaiian tradition. From Matt's fractured nuclear family to his large networks of cousins, aunts and uncles, to Elizabeth's friends and well-wishers, the characters in "The Descendants" are rarely alone. They may fight in ugly and profane ways, but they never abandon one another, especially in difficult times.

The family circles extend beyond the living to the dead. Matt is the executor of a large estate on the island of Kauai that he and his cousins inherited from their royal ancestors. Added to the tragedies he faces is the question of what to do with the land, a gorgeous parcel of virgin territory that some cousins hope to sell to a developer. When the family meets to vote on the question, they gather in a house filled with pictures of their dead relatives. For them the past is still very much alive. In his few short scenes, Beau Bridges, playing Matt's cousin Hugh, cleverly conveys the unseen bonds that keep this unusual family together.

Elizabeth also serves as a ghostly presence in the film. She hovers on the edge of life and death, serving as a silent interlocutor for Matt and the rest of the King family. As Elizabeth's condition worsens, each is allowed a moment alone with her. Even Judy Greer, who plays the wife of the man with whom Elizabeth had an affair, feels the need to talk to her. "I forgive you," she says, again and again, louder and louder until Matt intervenes. What is it about a comatose patient that concentrates the mind? Like Pedro Almodóvar ("Talk to Her"), Payne is intrigued by the questions raised and the emotions stirred by a woman on the verge of death.

The title "The Descendants" can refer to several groups of people: Matt's two daughters, left motherless by circumstance; Matt and his cousins, mulling over the fate of their ancestral land; the people of Hawaii, entrusted with a precious but fragile resource. The film does not, however, hint at another meaning of descendants: the children of Abraham. Though "The Descendants" is a poetic meditation on the meaning of land and family, it has little overt to say about faith or the afterlife. Even when the Kings face the grim reality of death, God is never mentioned. The omission of religion is to be expected in a Hollywood film, but from the Jesuit-educated Payne, we might have hoped for something more.

MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY *is online editor of* ***America****.*

BOOKINGS | RAYMOND A. SCHROTH

TWO FOR THE ROAD

The best travel writing is usually about something else—not just been-there and saw-that. There is an inner voyage, even for the atheist, a spiritual experience—if not an encounter with God at least a glimpse into the mystery of life embodied in crumbling walls or crashing waves. The tourist joins a group, rides a bus, hires a guide, buys souvenirs, sends postcards, takes pictures; the traveler carries his reporter's notebook, walks the boulevards, parks and museums alone, scribbles his notes with wine at dinner in a small outdoor café and scours the local newspapers, even if he can't read the language, for some sense of how this town relates to the rest of the world.

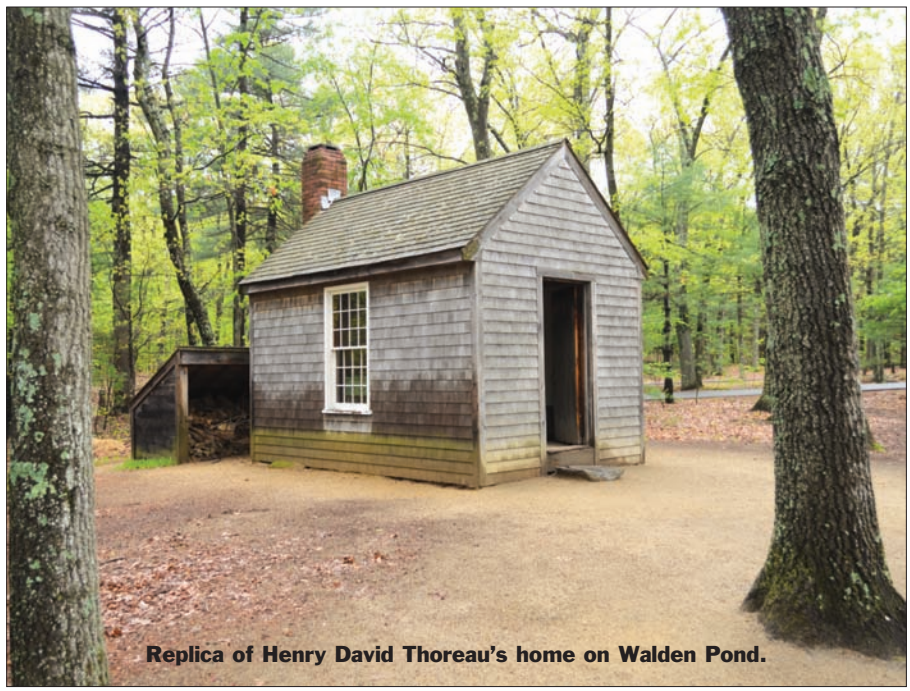
The travels of E. B. White (1899-1985), the New Yorker essayist and coauthor, with William Strunk Jr., of *The Elements of Style*, seldom took him far from his several homes in Maine, Florida and New York. In the 1940s home was Turtle Bay, on New York's East Side, and the United Nations was built in his neighborhood; later he returned to his little farm in North Brooklin, on the Maine coast. This was the setting of "Death of a Pig," about the passing and burial of White's pig, which he was supposed to slaughter for a holiday meal. Instead, he nursed it through a fatal "hemorrhagic infarct" as if it were his own child.

Time is a character in "Once More to the Lake," in which he takes his young son to the same lake camp to which his father took him. The smell of the bedroom and the sound of the boy sneaking out to row the boat along the shore sustains the illusion, the "creepy sensation," that he is his son and also that he is his own father—that "there had been no years." In the last paragraph, as he witnesses the boy, skinny and bare, pull up his wet bathing suit around his vitals, White suddenly feels "the chill of death."

In his best-known essay, "This Is New York," in 1948 Grand Central Terminal has become honky tonk, the great mansions are in decline, and there is generally more tension, irritability and great speed. The subtlest change is that the city is now destructible. A single flight of planes no bigger than a flock of geese could end this island fantasy, burn the towers and crumble the bridges. But the United Nations will make this the capital of the world. The perfect target may become the perfect "demonstration of nonviolence and racial brotherhood." A block away in an interior garden was an old willow tree. This tree, symbol of the city, White said, must survive.

Last week I walked to the U.N. headquarters and found them guarded, surrounded and barricaded by a high, post-9/11 fence. A block away, behind 10 brownstones, the tree survives.

In 1939 White drove up to Walden Pond and wrote an imaginary letter to Henry David Thoreau (1817-62), his kindred spirit, in which he explained what it is like to drive a car—"the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore, if I may coin a phrase"—and that someone had left beer bottles on the site of his original cabin. I have visited Walden three times and swam in the pond, thrilled to recapture the sensations that inspired Thoreau's prose. The setting itself is not spectacular—just simple, unspoiled and awesome. It sets the scene for prose like this: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could learn what it had to teach, and not, when I come to die, discover that I had not lived." A short walk down the road, Thoreau rests in Sleepy Hollow cemetery, his little stone marker, no bigger than an envelope, embossed "Henry," guarded by a



Replica of Henry David Thoreau's home on Walden Pond.

ON THE WEB

Timothy A. Byrnes discusses his book *Reverse Mission.*
americamagazine.org/podcast

cricket perched on top.

Thoreau was an eccentric but not a recluse. He paddled the Concord and Merrimac rivers, traveled to Maine, Staten Island, Manhattan and Minnesota, writing as he went. He walked to Concord nearly every day and loved to talk. To anyone who listens, he is talking still.

RAYMOND A. SCHROTH, S.J., *is an associate editor of* ***America****.*

BOOKS | JON M. SWEENEY

MASTER OF PARADOX

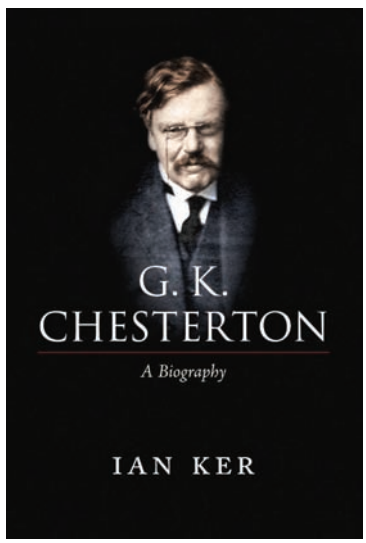
G. K. CHESTERTON
A Biography

By Ian Ker
Oxford Univ. Press. 688p $65

Marshall McLuhan's first essay was titled "G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic." McLuhan also wrote on Hopkins and Joyce (contrasting him with Aquinas) long before he published *The Medium Is the Massage* in 1967. He credited his conversion to Catholicism to discovering Chesterton while in graduate school at Cambridge, writing to his mother: "[H]ad I not encountered Chesterton, I would have remained agnostic." How G.K.C. the journalist, controversialist and Catholic convert himself (in 1922) came to affect his century will be the subject of many books to come. In the meantime, we have Ian Ker's masterful biography.

Ker, whose books include *The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845-1961*, has now become the most important source we have for understanding the master of paradox. He improves upon Maisie Ward's sources, interpretations and even her transcriptions. The latter becomes clear by page 40 in Ker, after several footnotes read that he is quoting from manuscripts previously quoted in Ward "with text corrected." Finally Ker notes: "Ward is not the most accurate of transcribers, but here her text is unusually inaccurate." But credit where credit is due: Maisie's *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* was published in 1944 and has only now been superseded, nearly 70 years later.

According to some estimates, G.K.C. published more than four million words in his lifetime with his books, essays, poems and journalism. One gets the impression while reading Ker's book that the author read the entire corpus and did not want any of his effort to go to waste. So we are treated to a page and a half on an article Chesterton wrote on patriotism in 1904 and 23 pages on *Orthodoxy*. Lengthy explications of the writings are broken up by returns to the chronology of Chesterton's life. (Ker put the same reading to good use with the simultaneous publication this spring of a 900-page edited collection: *The Everyman Chesterton*. It disappoints only in its exclusion of G.K.C.'s silly verse and his drawings for children, which Ward faithfully preserved in *Return to Chesterton*, and what many believe to be Chesterton's best book, *Saint Francis of Assisi*. Instead, Ker includes portions of *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, perhaps believing that Chesterton's perspective on St. Francis is carried into the first chapter, "On Two Friars," of the latter work.)



Ker consistently selects the best source and quotation to make his point, as when he plucks the following description of G.K.C.'s famously ragtag appearance from Henry James's secretary. James instructed her to spy on Chesterton, and she saw "a sort of elephant with a crimson face and oily curls. [Mr. James] thinks it very tragic that his mind should be imprisoned in such a body." Chesterton's inability to care for himself is, in fact, a constant theme in this biography. He lived in an era when a wife might literally dress her husband, and Chesterton's Frances did that and more. Over and over we are reminded how impractical the man was, how he went from mother to wife never having to tend to his daily needs himself. We see taxis waiting for hours while he refuses to walk one block of Fleet Street (his bulk dissuaded him) or from pub to pub (drink dissuaded him), talking and scribbling all the way. Here is the lovable, affable, absent-minded journalist.

Ker offers surprises to the devout admirer of Chesterton, as when Frances attends séances in an attempt to communicate with her dead brother. And he delights the assiduous reader with fresh details about Chesterton's friendship with Shaw, new information unearthed from the British Library regarding the Chestertons' visit to the Holy Land in winter 1920 and revelations from the "American Diary" of Frances, kept during their 1921 trip.

There are problems with Chesterton, of course, and Ker does not always address them adequately. When he discusses anti-Semitism, he is less than convincing in defense of his subject, and on one occasion the explanation itself is disconcerting. This is a

case when Chesterton was himself subjected to prejudice. While still a young writer, he had an article rejected by a literary advisor who judged that "the handwriting was that of a Jew." Ker defends the advisor's comment, explaining he "was simply saying that Chesterton's handwriting was like that of a Jew" in its ornate style, "Jews being famously artistic." Such generalizations seem inconsequential when Ker later offers that "hairdressers are famous for their conversational resources," but not so here. Then, when discussing Chesterton's controversial *A Short History of England*, a key book for understanding his alleged anti-Semitism, Ker goes on for five pages without even mentioning the issue. In *A Short History* Chesterton refers to the Jews of England as "alien financiers" who were "as powerful as they are unpopular" and hence justly expelled from England by the king in 1290. Still later, Ker concludes that Chesterton was not anti-Semitic, but anti-Jewish, as "many Europeans are anti-American today."

There are other occasions when Ker's admiration for his subject seems to get in the way of objectivity. More than once he states that G.K.C.'s *Autobiography* should be ranked with Newman's and Ruskin's as the greatest by Victorian "sages." Comparisons to Newman recur frequently throughout the biography. Ker aims to convince us that Chesterton was a "major" writer, not a minor one. He goes so far as to write, "I have set out enough evidence to show that Chesterton is one of our great literary critics, to be mentioned in the same breath as Johnson, Coleridge, Arnold, and Eliot." One would be hard pressed to locate another critic today who would agree. Ker bases his opinion largely on *Charles Dickens*, in which Chesterton claims Dickens was an unconscious Catholic—a claim he would later make about Shakespeare in his debates with Shaw.

Like most of his contemporaries, Chesterton's perspective on people of other faith traditions is usually unhelpful for the multifaith 21st century. Ker seems to quote unwittingly and with approval an unfortunate instance of Chestertonian juxtaposition from 1904, as Chesterton contrasts the way Islam, by forbidding alcohol consumption, "makes wine a poison" while Christianity "makes it a sacrament." Later, in discussions of his major works, Ker approvingly quotes as Chesterton disparages Islam with lines about its "sinister" and "barbaric" qualities. This is unfortunate. Ker's biography is essential, a labor of love to be sure, but one wishes for critique as well as context of this fascinating man who proudly traded in words.

JON M. SWEENEY, *a frequent contributor to* ***America****'s culture section, is the author of many books, including* The Pope Who Quit: A True Medieval Tale of Mystery, Death, and Salvation, *to be published by Image Books in March.*

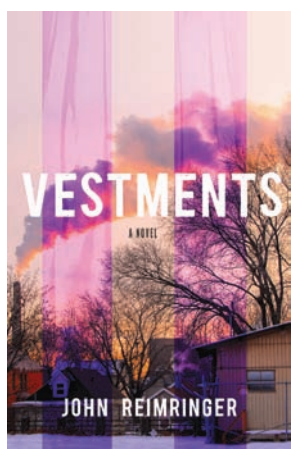
DORIS DONNELLY

MAN OF THE CLOTH

VESTMENTS
A Novel

By John Reimringer
Milkweed Editions. 432p $16 (paperback)

From the Latin *vestimentum* and the French *vêtement*, the word "vestments" means clothing, the kind that covers the body, protects it and sometimes intentionally camouflages what is underneath. It also refers to garments worn by members of the Catholic clergy, "men of the cloth," at church services. Either way—or in this case, both ways—it is the fitting one-word title for this engrossing debut novel by John Reimringer and the insider's glimpse it offers into the life and loves of a contemporary priest, James (Jim) Dressler, and his struggles with the black garb and white collar of his calling.



As a dutiful altar boy, young Jim Dressler was drawn early to the tried and familiar rituals of the church, "the unexpected sensual fabric of Catholicism," the Mass that was the anchor of his week, a safe harbor from his tempestuous home, and to the priesthood in the person of his pastor, Father Phil. "I imagined myself like him, robed in white, pure and strong." That idealism resurfaced in his senior year at college. With an honors degree in history, Jim saw the seminary as "a locker room full of knowledge and power where largeness of spirit and good manners were taught, where a honed mind was valued as much as sports and knowing how to hold your liquor or tell an off-color joke."

With the support of his devout Granddad Otto and the encouragement of Father Phil, Dressler applied to a Minnesota seminary at a time when those in charge of the education and formation of candidates for the priesthood were especially rigorous in the screening process. Reimringer spares us the details about the vetting, but Jim made the cut even though he carried baggage—a home where daily life involved a brawling, pugnacious father and an active high school sex life with a string of teenage lovers, including a

serious sexual relationship with a young woman named Betty Garcia that ended tragically.

Dressler often and sincerely addressed the conundrum about his fitness for the priesthood even after living as a celibate in college. "Does it get lonely," he asked, "not having a wife and kids?" Father Phil offered the first of a series of evasive and utterly mystifying replies: "Get a hobby." Yet no one at seminary or among his priest friends did any better. A plausible reason for the lack of straightforward, honest, reliable counsel on the subject is that nowhere in the book do we, or Jim, meet a priest in a healthy relationship with a woman—a puzzling omission on Reimringer's part, unless he is intimating that such mature experiences and conversations are rare in both actual life and fiction.

Instead we meet pastors like George Martin, totally a guy's guy, who presided over Sunday night poker games at his rectory, or the seminary's Father Friedel, a k a Father Fritter, completely clueless about women except for the creepy conviction that they lurked everywhere as sources of sin both large and small.

Far more demoralizing for Dressler was his friend Mick, who contradicted everything Jim wanted to believe was possible. "I nearly quit when giving up women didn't work," Mick told Jim. "And then I decided I could have both." Self-confident, cynical and ambitious, Mick was certain that there would always be room for him and his unscrupulous behavior in a church that harbored hypocrites and even promoted them. He was right. A plum assignment in Rome was waiting after his flagrant behavior was exposed.

Lacking Mick's manipulative skills, Dressler could not count on such luck. His comparatively minor indiscretion unleashed an eviction from his parish, transfer to a punitive assignment and, mercifully, a last-minute reprieve in the form of an offer to teach history at St. John's College.

Reimringer opens his story with Jim Dressler at home in St. Paul with his dysfunctional family, biding his time before college opens at the end of summer. He keeps busy with tender visits to incapacitated Granddad Otto, preparations for presiding at his brother's wedding, explaining to family and friends who inquire that he still is a priest, only on leave, and reflecting on the privileged place he has as a priest in service to the church he loves. Betty Garcia is in town, too. She is now a successful labor lawyer, newly divorced, and her mere presence is enough to loosen the hold of Jim's clerical collar. Over coffee they face the unfairness of life, the consequences of human choices gone wrong and consider their futures with or without each other.

Unlike its predatory character Mick, *Vestments* has us wondering whether there might be a place in the church someday for a generous, flawed, gentle, committed man like James Dressler to satisfy two noble desires—one for the priesthood and another for a wife and family. The bittersweet ending of the book says "not now," and Jim Dressler must make a choice between two loves.

Reimringer knows well the landscape of St. Paul, Minnesota. He knows, too, the landscape of the Catholic Church—seminary mentoring, rectory loneliness, the bonding of men of the cloth—and he writes about these things with a combination of affection and ruthless honesty. He also knows the fragility of the human heart, broken as is the body of Christ at Eucharist, with an embedded promise of healing. We hope for an intense dose of that healing for James Dressler and men like him as we close this book.

DORIS DONNELLY *is a professor of theology at John Carroll University, Cleveland, Ohio.*

LETTERS

Raise Salaries, Lose Jobs?

In response to "Will the Majority Rule?" (Current Comment, 12/12), it is hard to be opposed to the minimum wage. Yet, at the same time, an increase in the minimum wage plays out in an increase in the overall domestic wage structure, broadening the disparity between wages here and abroad. This is what has led to the "hollowing-out of America"—the shift of jobs abroad. How many more jobs will move abroad because of the proposed wage increase, and how many more unskilled young men and women, particularly in our big cities, will as a result never work a productive day in their lives? Here is the law of unintended consequences. How do we decide what wage increase is justified when there will be these other consequences?

THOMAS H. BARTON
New York, N.Y.

Where Am I?

Re "New Roman Committee to Critique Churches" (Signs of the Times, 12/12), I say: Not to worry. If the structural changes they propose or require in Catholic church architecture even remotely resemble the sentence structure and grammar in the third edition of the Roman Missal, the buildings will collapse under their own weight within less than a decade! And the aisles and alcoves will resemble a labyrinth or an M. C. Escher architectural drawing.

KEN MILLER
Cleveland, Ohio

Moral Budgets

Editorials like "Raise Up the Lowly" (12/19) keep me coming back to **America** and to the Catholic Church. Your compassion, facts, logic and eloquence say it all. Our social contracts, our budgets are moral documents. Duped by media lies, our country has become one of the least "Christian" in the industrialized world. Thank you for a reminder of the Gospels' repeated call of the poor.

ELAINE TANNESON
Kingston, Wash.

Another Kind of Cover-Up

The article "A Change in Formation," by Katarina Schuth, O.S.F. (1/2), missed an important detail. The cover-up within the hierarchy has been imitated by the psychological profession. Have you ever heard a psychologist admit how advice "back in the day" would sometimes diagnose the sexual abuser as only going through a phase of delayed adolescence? No one blames the psychologists today for what psychologists did not know then.

But they are indeed now called upon to admit some accountability for advice that once misled bishops and seminary rectors. Their silence appears to attempt to protect the reputation of the profession from the same shame that anyone involved in the church's case knows well.

JEROME KNEIS
Racine, Wis.

The Unsaid Word

The author of "A Change in Formation" seems unable to bring herself to mention homosexuality. Those

who choose to write on this topic and ignore the well-documented homosexuality in the seminaries of the era are themselves culpable. One is reminded of the disastrous handling of AIDS in public and church literature, where no one would utter the expression "anal intercourse." Thousands died and millions of dollars were wasted as a result.

CHRIS MULCAHY
Fort Myers Beach, Fla.

Courtship Counts

In response to your editorial "The Way of Life" (1/16): The role of the father in a pregnancy is crucial. A woman ordinarily does not abort a pregnancy if she is in love with the father of the baby and he is supportive of her. A man who abandons a woman who is pregnant by him has "thrown away" the unborn child, which makes it far more likely that the mother will do the same. Laypeople were invited by Pope John Paul II to teach the young about sexuality. If we actually did that, we might find reason to speak some truths about courtship. If we cannot, courtships will fail and abortion will be one of the results.

LISA WEBER
Spokane, Wash.

Economy Up, Abortions Down

I agree with the editorial "The Way of Life" (1/16), that the focus on abortion must broaden. But most observers still overlook the most obvious solution. The research I have read shows that abortion rates go down when the economy is good and there is a good social safety network; they go up when the economy is bad and there is an inadequate safety network. So if people are really interested in reducing abortions, they should work for overall improvements in the economy and in the welfare of the common working people.

EMMA FITZPATRICK
Albuquerque, N.M.

Clothes Make the Man

Re the Of Many Things column by Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., on Jan. 16: Geoffrey Robinson, bishop of Sydney from 1984 to 2004, hit the nail on the episcopal head when he wrote: "During the second millennium many bishops adopted clothes and ornaments that spoke of power and riches. I do not think we have gone far enough in abandoning this trend. The church should start by consigning the mitre to the dustbin of history." Only a small part of communication is verbal. Body language is of great importance. Wearing a hat that makes one far taller than any other person present is strong body language, conveying the message that I am more powerful and important than anyone else here. Is this the message Jesus wanted to convey?

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

As Dostoevski Would Say...

Maybe, if he were true to himself, Bishop Josh, addressed in a letter from two old friends in Of Many Things (1/16), would respond to Mary and Joe, like an updated version of Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor, that the church has outgrown Jesus' original vision and that people like him are needed to tend the flock and prevent them from straying. Certainly it is hard to envision Jesus fitting comfortably with today's church leadership.

JOHN HOLL
Maplewood, N.J.

Who Cares?

Mary Meehan's "In Harm's Way" (1/16), on the cost of our wars on the civilians on both sides, struck me as I read an article in The Washington Post on Jan. 8 about American indifference to the death of civilians during its wars since World War II. It concluded that the United States has killed roughly six million innocent people since then. We seem to do this without any particular guilt, imagining always that we are just the good guy trying to clean up the neighborhood.

WILLIAM TAYLOR
Nampa, Idaho

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Beyond Suffering

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), FEB. 5, 2012

Readings: Job 7:1-7; Ps 147:1-6; 1 Cor 9: 16-23; Mk 1:29-39

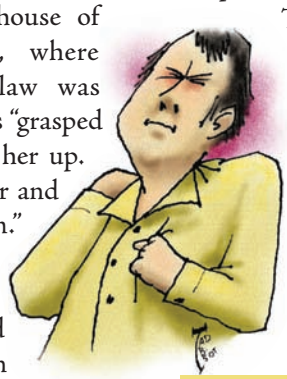
"So I have been assigned months of misery" (Job 7:3)

Why do we suffer? The problem of suffering seems to implicate God. The argument usually is framed this way: Because God allows horrific suffering, then God (if there is a God) is either not all-good, not all-powerful or not all-knowing. Job is a perfect foil to poor responses to this problem, the chief being that you suffer because you deserve it. This is what his friends argue, but Job will have none of it. We know that Job is righteous and does not deserve to suffer as he does. He bemoans the human condition: "Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? Are not his days those of a hireling?"

We also know that the chaos in Job's life is caused by a kind of bet between Satan and God. While the biblical figure of Satan has yet to take on the identity of Lucifer, Satan here is no benevolent spirit. *Ha-Satan* (Hebrew for "the adversary") is responsible for making Job's life a living hell.

By Jesus' day, Satan had emerged as the Prince of Darkness, with his minions harassing humans on every level, physically, mentally and spiritually. Given the breadth of Satan's attack, the lines that we would draw between spiritual evil and physical sickness were far more blurred. So when the Gospel reading today says that Jesus "cured many who were sick…and drove out many demons," we should see these healings as neither completely identical in kind nor entirely different. The Lord conquers evil on every level, and the physical, moral and spiritual interpenetrate one another.

The reading begins with Jesus entering the family house of Peter and Andrew, where "Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a fever." Jesus "grasped her hand and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them." These lines have led to more than a few complaints: Just recovered and she has to wait on them!



We should go a step deeper here. Mark tells us that Jesus healed her and then raised her (*ēgeiren*), Mark's term for Jesus' own resurrection (16:6). And when Mark tells us that she served them (*diēkonei*), he uses the word with which Jesus describes his own mission and indicates what he expects of true discipleship: "Whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all, for the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve" (10:44-45). Peter's mother-in-law's experience of the Lord reflects how the kingdom works, from healing to discipleship.

You may have noticed that I have so far avoided the problem of suffering. There are some partial answers. We know that everything not-God is, by definition, vulnerable (even angels, as Satan proves). We also know that without the possibility of moral evil no one would have free will of any significance. Additionally, most of us have experienced suffering as an important context in which to grow morally and spiritually. Any compassion that I have is directly founded on my own suffering. And surely responding to suffering binds us to one another powerfully. At the end of the day, nothing witnesses to love or purifies it better than suffering for love.

Of course, some suffering is so grotesque that these answers to the problem of suffering simply fall flat. This observation, in fact, parallels the ending of the story of Job. God tells Job's friends that they were dead wrong about Job. But God also tells Job that there are no good (that is, complete) human answers to the problem. The mystery of suffering remains an enigma.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Consider whether you carry any wounds.
- Invite the Lord to join you as you lean into the pain.
- Who needs you to gently share their pain?

ART: TAD DUNNE

Perhaps what the Scriptures reveal to us is that while suffering cannot be solved, it can be skillfully addressed. Blaming the victim ("You deserved it") or trivializing suffering ("Just praise God") only makes things worse. Both are foolish and alienating. Real engagement takes suffering seriously. Real engagement leans into the pain with compassion and love. Real engagement walks with the other with gentle faith in our Lord, who came to heal and serve and, indeed, to enter human suffering deeply and personally.

PETER FELDMEIER *is the Murray/Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Toledo.*

Healing the Leper

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), FEB. 12, 2012

Readings: Lv 13:1-2, 44-46; Ps 32:1-11; 1 Cor 10:31-11:1; Mk 1:40-45

"I do will it. Be healed" (Mk 1:41)

Would you consider yourself a leper? We use that term to mean several things. It could mean a person with Hansen's disease, the brutal ailment that attacks nerves and limbs and causes deformity. It can also be a term for social marginalization, as in, "I'm a leper around here."

The Scriptures today are all about leprosy and being healed from it. The first reading from Leviticus is part of the law that addresses *tzaraath*, which could be anything from bona fide leprosy to one of a variety of skin afflictions that were especially feared because they were thought to be contagious.

We learn in the first reading that if a priest deemed you afflicted, then you would tear your clothes, muss your hair and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." Our reading ends with the words, "He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp." Having any kind of skin disease would have put a person in horrible circumstances. Adding insult to injury, skin diseases were also often regarded as a punishment for sin and elicited scorn more often than compassion.

The Gospel tells of a leper who approaches Jesus, kneels before him and begs to be healed. The leper violates the rules. Instead of warning all and staying away, he does the opposite. And Jesus, rather than showing disdain, is moved by great compassion. Then Jesus touches and thereby heals him. In this encounter Jesus makes himself "unclean" in order to heal the leper.

To us it is obvious that skin disease has nothing to do with sin and that, further, the alienation of those afflicted was both unnecessary and unwittingly cruel. But we may do well here to enter fully into the religious imagination of the text. So, even though I hope no one now associates skin disease with moral guilt, leprosy remains a good metaphor for the condition of sin. Sin renders the human condition ugly; it deforms us. A penetrating expression of the ugliness of sin in literature is Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Gray, in a kind of deal with the devil, maintains a healthy, fresh, un-aging profile, living a decadent life without showing the effects on his body. But Gray's portrait magically changes to progressively reveal the state of Gray's deteriorating soul. By the end of the story it shows a hideous monster.

Consider also Isaiah's suffering servant, who becomes brutalized in taking on the sins of Israel: "So marred were his features…beyond that of human beings…. Yet it was our pain that he bore…crushed for our iniquity" (Is 52:14; 53:4-5). Our tradition sees Jesus' passion as the complete fulfillment of this text. When we look at the cross, we see an icon of how sin brutalizes us. In the reading today, Jesus prefigures this dynamic by touching the leper and becoming "unclean" in order to cleanse him.

Sin also distances us from others and even from our own truest self. People recovering from addiction regularly reflect on how addictive behavior isolates the addict, who becomes increasingly imprisoned in empty gratifications and filled with shame. As the addictive behavior worsens, the addict grows more and more distant from family and friends, becoming a leper "outside the camp." This is not simply a 12-step insight. Sin in general does this. It takes us from authentic communion with others to a deepening narcissism, while it numbs our moral horizons as surely as Hansen's disease numbs nerves.

In one sense, all of us are suffering from the leprosy of sin. But that disease is not our truest self, our deepest nature. Our true nature is inherently beautiful, made in the divine image and likeness. This is what Jesus would restore. It will not do to stay outside the camp, enduring the silent scream of our inner shame: "Unclean, unclean." We need the courage of the leper in the Gospel, unwilling to distance himself from the Lord and others. We would do well to come to Jesus, to seek his healing touch and hear his healing words: "I do will it. Be made clean."

This is what confession is for.

PETER FELDMEIER

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Consider how you keep God and others at bay.
- What do you fear?
- Invite God's love to heal you.

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