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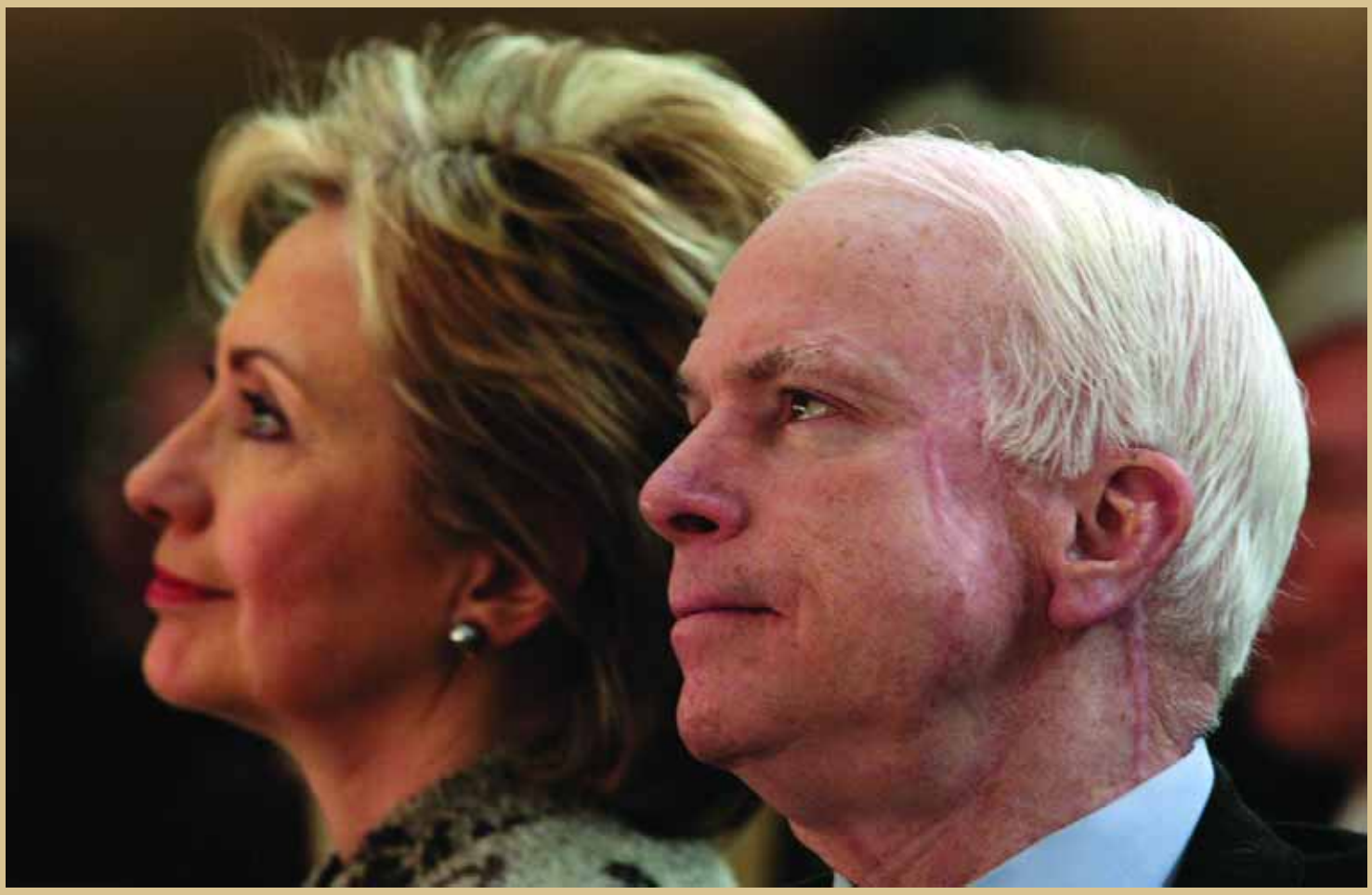
God and Presidential Politics

Matt Malone



What Would You Tell Your Bishop?
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Of Many Things

War stories are an inevitable byproduct of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many are stories of unspeakable tragedy and loss; they are told selectively and with reverence. Others are about the humdrum day-to-day existence of danger, fear and survival. But there are also stories with humorous elements; those are the ones most easily told to family and friends and then repeated by them.

One of my friends was stationed in Mosul, in the north of Iraq. He ran a railroad, a big one with a staggering logistical capacity. Though there was constant danger, the general situation was then more peaceful than it later became. He and his troops actually got to know Iraqis, were careful not to refer to them as *hajis*, went to their shops and restaurants and came to respect them. The Americans were fascinated to see that university students had discovered Skoal, the smokeless tobacco, and had even perfected the shake of the can. And they picked up local gossip, including the belief that the new wraparound sunglasses afforded the soldiers X-ray vision. As a result, the sunglasses became obligatory for all whenever they took out a convoy. And his entire unit returned safely from Iraq, with their lives and their sunglasses.

Our Christian family war stories have no elements of humor. And from the same city of Mosul come tales of persecution, emigration and death.

The Chaldean archbishop of Mosul, Paulos Faraj Rahho, painted a dark picture of conditions in his diocese. He recognizes that the U.S. forces are "cleaning up" in the south of the country; but that has forced the terrorists to move north, and now they are concentrated in Mosul.

He blames the deplorable state of international politics and the ambitions of Iraq's neighbors for the chaos. "They don't want a free and independent Iraq because it would be too strong. United we would constitute a great intellectual and economic power. By keeping the country weak and divided, it is easier to dominate it." Though Christians in Mosul are only 3 percent of the population, they represent 35 percent of those with higher education; and doctors, lawyers, professors, clergy and journalists are the prime targets of terrorism. Many choose to flee.

In Baghdad it is almost as bad, according to Canon Andrew White, an Anglican priest who ministers to a diminishing community there. Canon White estimates that 90 percent of Iraqi Christians have fled or been murdered. Churches had to close in the city during the worst violence, and Christians were reluctant to seek protection, lest they be accused of collaborating with the U.S. military. Their prudence did not do much good, and Canon White estimates that the situation for Christians in Iraq at present is the most difficult in history.

But even for those who have managed to flee, life is far from easy. Antoine Audo, S.J., the Chaldean bishop of Aleppo in Syria, where there are 50,000 Chaldean Catholic refugees from Iraq, spoke recently of their plight. They left behind danger and instability, sometimes forced from their homes by Islamic jihadis. With few material resources and facing the scarcity of jobs in Syria, poverty and survival have forced many into prostitution. Christian relief organizations and overseas relatives provide some help, but more is needed. Bishop Audo also warned that in addition to the refugee crisis, there is also danger that Islamic jihadism will spread from Iraq to Syria and other neighboring countries.

Clearly there are limits to what relief organizations can do to ease the plight of Iraqi Christians in their own country or in the countries where they have sought refuge. It is equally clear that there are limits to what governments and military forces can do to restore even a semblance of peace and security, even when and where goodwill is present. And it is not clearly present in this maelstrom of horror and suffering. Of course we can pray, give alms, pressure politicians, become active in peace building groups; but there remains a pervasive sadness about how terribly people treat one another.

My officer friend with the railroad and sunglasses is, by coincidence, from Michigan, and Michigan is the center of a vibrant and generous Chaldean Catholic community of Iraqi Christians. May we, with them, dare hope for peace and prosperity for all in Iraq, in God's providence, though it may take decades. We repeat the prayer of Archbishop Paulos: "Like Christmas in the past, this time the main message of our prayers shall be for peace, which is what we wish uppermost and which we are trying to achieve."

Dennis M. Linehan, S.J.

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Cover photo Presidential hopefuls Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator John McCain at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington on Feb. 1, 2007. Reuters/Kevin Lamarque

Articles

This week @ America Connects

Gerald O'Collins, S.J., evaluates Pope Benedict's new encyclical, *Spe Salvi*. From the archives: Mary McGrory on the John F. Kennedy campaign trail. On our podcast, Jim McDermott, S.J., talks about comedy writing. All at www.americamagazine.org.

A Halting Start

If the Secretary of State's closing talk was any measure, last week's conference in Annapolis, Md., got the Middle East peace process off to a halting start. Condoleezza Rice, usually full-voiced and self-assured, read her remarks in a weak and uncertain manner, like a rank amateur. Her obvious lack of confidence in her own message was a metaphor for the event. Apart from gathering representatives of 49 nations and international organizations, the conference achieved little more than setting a schedule for Israeli and Palestinian officials to meet regularly for negotiations over the next year. No new ideas were advanced, no schema for negotiation ratified, no pressure applied. Popular opposition to the talks was manifest on the streets of Jerusalem, Nablus and Gaza. If there is to be a new Palestinian state by 2009, then the major issues need to be worked out in no more than six months, so there will be time to bring the uncertain populations and fractious political coalitions on board and to plan for implementing the accord. The timing is critical. In particular, achieving peace requires that both sides find a new way to engage Hamas, the Islamist group that controls Gaza and a majority in the Palestinian legislature. Only determination by the United States to grasp the nettles represented by Hamas will make this happen. But President Bush's parting remarks to the Israeli and Palestinian leaders augured no intense involvement on his part: "I wish you all the best."

Demolitions in New Orleans

The scheduled mid-December demolition of 3,000 public housing units in New Orleans in the wake of the hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 has prompted over 40 human rights organizations to decry a move they see as an injustice to low-income residents. In a letter to federal officials, including Alfonso Jackson, secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, they argue that the pending demolitions fail to take into account findings that the units are largely sound. Nevertheless, without the advance knowledge or consent of residents, contractors have already begun emptying apartments and throwing out personal documents like Social Security cards. There is no clarity as to whether already displaced persons will be granted adequate alternative housing. The letter also notes that an independent survey assessing the number of displaced residents who wish to return to the city is not yet complete.

New Orleans is not alone in experiencing the demolition of large segments of its public housing. In Chicago, HUD destroyed more public housing units than it replaced. Thirteen thousand demolitions there have forced 20,000 people from their homes, and many clients are now left waiting for new quarters. Actions like those pending in New Orleans and tear-downs that have already occurred in Chicago and elsewhere exacerbate the nation's lack of affordable housing and threaten an increase in homelessness for financially vulnerable people. Underscoring the sense of crisis, Catherine Albisa, executive director of the National Economic & Social Rights Initiative, has said of New Orleans: "Every moment we fail to act is another unit demolished, another grandmother evicted, or another child who finds him or herself doing homework in a shelter."

Out Tancredo-ing Tancredo

Civility wilted in the heat of the CNN/YouTube debate on Nov. 28, in which several of the Republican presidential candidates, few of them being entirely accurate or fair, accused the others of being soft on illegal immigrants. The invective even escalated to the point where Representative Tom Tancredo, whose own virulent opposition to illegal immigration sometimes looks like irrational xenophobia, declared that the candidates were "trying to out-Tancredo Tancredo."

The Democrats, of course, have had their own moments of incivility, sometimes driven by the seemingly irresistible need in American politics to have scapegoats. But illegal immigration is a particular preoccupation of Republicans, so most of the Republican contenders include in their stump speeches vigorous denunciations of so-called illegals—a bit of rhetorical red meat for the caucusing lions. Some candidates, however, refuse to pay the butcher's bill. Senator John McCain told the crowd that he was saddened by the tone of the debate and that Americans should "recognize these are God's children as well and they need some protections under the law and they need some of our love and compassion."

Mr. McCain is right, and his lackluster standing in the polls is likely the price he is paying for it. Yet immigration is intensifying into one of the nation's most pressing public policy problems and is of great concern to the independent voters who may make the difference in this election. As a result, the risk of demagoguery is high. Politics is nastiest when race or class is involved and this issue involves both. Politicians of both parties should be mindful of Senator McCain's admonition and watch their rhetoric.

Myanmar's Anguish

THE STRUGGLE OF THE PEOPLE of Myanmar for justice in the face of an iron-fisted military junta (which changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989) that tolerates no dissent continues unabated. At the center of the struggle is the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy party that won an overwhelming victory in the 1990 election. Spurning those election results, however, the junta, formally known as the State Peace and Development Council, placed her under house arrest, where she has remained on and off for a dozen of the last 18 years.

The violent attacks on peaceful protesters last September shocked the international community, as photos circulated around the world over the Internet. Soldiers fired into a crowd of monks and peaceful protesters in Yangon, killing some and arresting many hundreds more. The junta has acknowledged that 15 people were killed, but its opponents believe the number may be much higher. The participation of monks in the protest, in a country where Buddhism is the dominant religion, made domestic reaction and international condemnation all the stronger.

The army claims to be an all-volunteer force, but so pressing is its need for more soldiers that recruitment efforts extend even to children. Recent reports by Human Rights Watch describe in detail how army recruiters, desperate to meet their quotas, virtually buy children. High desertion rates make the recruiters' desperation all the more intense. In an effort to allay growing international criticism, the junta established what it calls the Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Underage Children. In fact, Jo Becker of Human Rights Watch, the organization's children's rights advocate, told **America** that the committee and other activities are basically cosmetic and "have done nothing to change the practice on the ground."

Recruiters continue to watch bus and train stations and markets for boys, who are promised money, free education and other benefits. Resistance can lead to beatings. Theoretically, recruits must prove that they are at least 18 years old, but according to interviews with recruits, there is little insistence on real proof. According to Human Rights Watch, one boy failed his medical exam because he weighed only 70 pounds. His recruiter, though, bribed the medical officer to allow the child to enlist. Some boys have been involved in the army's ethnic cleansing attacks on minority villages in the eastern part of the country, where fighting has displaced half a million ethnic Burmese, many of whom remain internally displaced persons.

China, Myanmar's giant neighbor to the north, and to some extent India and Russia, bear much of the responsibility for the junta's violent suppression of dissent and its attacks on ethnic minority groups. All three countries supply the army with weapons. Both China and Russia, moreover, have tried to block U.N. efforts to impose sanctions on the military government. For its purchase of arms, Myanmar depends largely on revenue from the sale of gemstones, for which the country is famous, especially rubies and jade. Over 90 percent of all rubies sold worldwide originate in Myanmar. In addition to serving as the main source of financing for arms purchases, the gems have also been one of the ways by which corrupt military officials have personally enriched themselves in a country where deep poverty is endemic. Attempting to block sales of the gems, the European Union in October placed sanctions on importing them, and legislation is pending in Congress that would ban their purchase in the United States. Some companies, like Tiffany & Co., have already refused to buy them, and after the September attack on protesters, Bulgari, Cartier and other jewelry companies followed suit.

FOR ALMOST HALF A CENTURY, the Burmese people have suffered under the weight of oppressive military governance. The greatest need now is for a return to democratic civilian rule. The courageous monks, some of whom have been beaten and jailed, and other peaceful protesters have made their voices heard throughout the world. They, together with the longstanding support shown for Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy party, make it clear that the people long for a civilian-ruled government that will respect their long-abused human rights. In the meantime, international pressure, including pressure by the United Nations, should focus on some of the more egregious abuses—ending the attacks on ethnic groups, the release of prisoners held primarily for the exercise of their right to free speech and prohibiting the recruitment of children into the army.

Pope Invites Muslim Scholars to Dialogue

Pope Benedict XVI has responded to a letter from 138 Muslim scholars by inviting a group of them to meet with him and with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The papal response, released Nov. 29, came in a letter to Jordan's Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, president of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman and architect of the Muslim scholars' project. The letter, signed Nov. 19 by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican secretary of state, said the pope wanted "to express his deep appreciation" for the statement of the Muslim scholars, "for the positive spirit which inspired the text and for the call for a common commitment to promoting peace in the world."

The statement, originally signed by 138 Muslim scholars but later endorsed by dozens of others, was addressed to Pope Benedict and the heads of other Christian churches. Titled "A Common Word Between Us and You," the text was released in early October and called for new efforts at Christian-Muslim dialogue based on the shared belief in the existence of one God, in God's love for humanity and in people's obligation to love one another. By inviting a varied group of Muslim scholars to meet with him, Pope Benedict XVI has opened the possibility for a higher-level dialogue between Catholic and Muslim leaders, the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, said.

The newspaper commented Nov. 30 on the letter and the pope's response. The newspaper quoted Christian Troll, a Jesuit scholar of Islam at Kolleg Sankt Georgen in Frankfurt, Germany, who said that the 138 scholars represent a wide and diverse portion of the world's Muslim community, and the fact that they were able to write to the pope together is important. The letter, Father Troll said, is an initiative "which the church can only look favorably upon because it needs a skilled dialogue with the non-Christian world." L'Osservatore said, "The pope's response opens concrete horizons for this hope."

The pope's invitation included a suggestion that the scholars hold a working meeting with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and with experts from Rome's Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies and from the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Peace Requires Respect for Ethical Norms

Promoting lasting peace, justice and human dignity requires solidarity and respect for unchanging moral values, Pope Benedict XVI said.

Meeting Dec. 1 with representatives of 85 Catholic agencies recognized as nongovernmental organizations by the United Nations and other international bodies, Pope Benedict said the problems of humanity cannot be solved without a clear acceptance of ethical norms.

"International discussions often seem marked by a relativistic logic," which is convinced that the only way to find agreement and promote peaceful coexistence is to ignore the fact that each human life was created by God and to pretend that there are no moral absolutes, the pope said.

"This has led, in effect, to the imposition of a notion of law and politics which ultimately makes consensus between states—a consensus conditioned at times by short-term interests or manipulated by ideological pressure—the only real basis of international norms," he said.

Pope's New Encyclical, 'Spe Salvi,' Addresses Modern Crisis of Hope

Copies of the new encyclical on Christian hope are presented in various languages at the Vatican.

In an encyclical on Christian hope, Pope Benedict XVI said that without faith in God, humanity lies at the mercy of ideologies that can lead to "the greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice." The pope warned that the modern age has replaced belief in eternal salvation with faith in progress and technology, which offer opportunities for good but also open up "appalling possibilities for evil." "Let us put it very simply: Man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope," he said in the encyclical, *Spe Salvi* ("On Christian Hope"), released Nov. 30.

The 76-page text explores the essential connection between faith and hope in early Christianity and addresses what it calls a "crisis of Christian hope" in modern times. It critiques philosophical rationalism and Marxism and offers brief but powerful profiles of Christian saints—ancient and modern—who embodied hope, even in the face of suffering.

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.

Christmas Market Helps Buoy Spirits in Bethlehem

Palestinian shoppers at the Christmas market in Manger Square outside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, West Bank.

Just like the local traffic winding its way slowly up toward Nativity Square, Bethlehem is filled with a feeling of stagnation and uncertainty. Even the rain pelting down on the Christmas market shoppers in Nativity Square Dec. 2 is not steady as it comes in fits and starts, leaving people unsure whether to run for shelter or to continue their shopping. "Things are more calm here politically than in other Palestinian cities, but economically the situation is worse. People here depend on tourism, and that is not good now," said Shireen, a 26-year-old Catholic who used only her first name. Her 29-year-old Catholic friend, Rula Sammour, noted that the late-November Middle East peace conference in Annapolis, Md., has given people a bit of hope things will begin to move again after a long time of feeling stuck. But as the Christmas season begins, the annual one-day Christmas market buoys people's spirits. Vendors from Norway offer free tastes of Norwegian cheese, salami and salmon wraps; young Danes wearing Santa hats man a booth selling Danish toys. Greek baked goods, Italian pottery, Egyptian Christmas decorations and South African wooden carvings are also on sale.

Bishops Call for Action on Immigration

Three Los Angeles auxiliary bishops announced Nov. 27 that the Los Angeles Archdiocese's annual procession in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 2 would be part of a statewide call for action on comprehensive immigration reform issued by the California Catholic Conference of Bishops. The conference issued a statement the same day saying the U.S. government has a right to control its borders and enforce laws but also that human rights of undocumented people must be respected and that they need an opportunity to legalize their status.

Elsewhere, the Catholic bishops of Maryland urged the one million Catholics in their state to engage in a faith-filled dialogue on immigration; and in Tulsa, Okla., Bishop Edward J. Slattery issued a pastoral outlining the diocese's four-point action plan to respond to a new state statute on illegal immigration described as one of the harshest in the nation. The plan calls, in part, for people to have equal access to all Catholic programs regardless of their immigration status and pledges to provide legal help to those who want to establish or maintain their legal residence in the United States.

Henry J. Hyde, Former Congressman, Dies at 83

Henry J. Hyde, the former Republican congressman from Illinois whose name became synonymous with efforts to limit federal funding of abortion, died Nov. 29 at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. Hyde's death was announced in Washington by the House minority leader, John Boehner, Republican of Ohio, who gave no cause of death for the 83-year-old Catholic political figure. Hyde retired from politics in 2006 after 32 years in Congress and eight years in the Illinois Legislature. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, from President George W. Bush Nov. 5, but was unable to attend the White House ceremony because he was recovering from quadruple heart bypass surgery.

At the ceremony, Bush described Hyde as a "commanding presence" and "a man of consequence," who impressed colleagues with his "extraordinary intellect, his deep convictions and eloquent voice." His son Robert accepted the medal, saying it "affirms the importance and value of his stance on many things, like right to life." Henry Hyde was named a Knight of St. Gregory by Pope Benedict XVI in 2006 in recognition of his longtime defense of life.

Advent Speakers Reflect on Muslim Letter

During Advent, Catholics are called to "put on the armor of light, to be peacemakers beating swords of war and anger into plowshares, and to poke holes of light into the darkness which often seems to permeate our lives," according to Anne Tahaney, O.P. "The common themes of Advent, expectation and waiting in joyful hope call us to reflection and peace, yet tension and stress surround us in our own personal lives, and war and death and destruction loom daily before us in newscasts," she said. Sister Tahaney spoke Dec. 2 at an Advent vespers service at Gray-moor, headquarters of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement. Others were scheduled to speak Dec. 9, 16 and 23.

This year's speakers were asked to reflect on "A Common Word Between Us and You," an October 2007 letter to Pope Benedict XVI and other Christian leaders signed by 138 senior Muslim leaders and later endorsed by dozens of others. Sister Tahaney is a 20-year member of the Catholic-Muslim dialogue of the Archdiocese of New York. She taught in Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country, for 29 years as part of the first group of Dominican sisters to be invited there.

Remembering a Darker Christmas Story

'In the groanings of the night, our challenge is to follow the light.'

'DID YOU KNOW that when I hug you, Mama, it's not just me who's hugging you? God is hugging you too." In a sentence, our four-year-old theologian summed up the mystery of the Incarnation. The context for her declaration was not a Hallmark moment, nor were the circumstances like those of the birth of Christ. She had been up sick all night. Like any parent, helpless to stop the waves of nausea wracking my small daughter's frame, all I could do was be with her, holding her hair back until the retching stopped, holding her hand, cleaning her and the bathroom up, tucking her back into bed and standing watch until the next round took hold. I was impotent to stop the course of the virus. But to her, my just being there with her in the darkness was cause for hugs of thanks.

Once again my children remind me of the core tenets of our faith. To me the brilliance of Ignatian spirituality is the simple directive to find God in all things. "In all things" is the rub. We are not tasked with seeing God's presence only in Hallmark moments, beautiful sunsets and Christmas choruses singing in harmony. St. Ignatius challenged his contemporaries and challenges us today to find God in the barrios of the poor, the beds of the sick, the awkward complications of those who need more than we can give—in precisely those bleak corners of life that at first glance seem most bereft of God.

Despair is easy; hope is hard. Especially at this cold and dark time of year, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the depth and darkness of human suffering, by the weight of wave after wave of bad news crashing onto the shores of our consciousness. The war in Iraq continues its voracious pace, killing innocents, displacing millions, but the culture urges us to forget that for now, to be merry and bright and deck the halls. As leaders in the Middle East meet, polls show the sides are further apart than ever before. Two-thirds of Palestinians believe the right of refugees to return to their homes is non-negotiable, while 80 percent of Israelis believe that Palestinian refugees should not be allowed back. Bethlehem is a poster child for division, barricaded behind a 27-foot high wall, Israel's version of last century's Berlin Wall.

Jesus' birthplace "is a prison," says Mike Canawati, a Palestinian Christian resident of Bethlehem who is not allowed outside the wall. Christian peacemaker teams note that Mary and Joseph would not be able to enter Bethlehem today, and many Palestinian mothers in labor give birth in cars or fields because they are prevented by the wall and checkpoints from reaching medical care in time. They urge us to build walls around our nativity sets to show solidarity with Palestinians in Bethlehem suffering from apartheid.

How can we sing of peace on earth?

It does not help that our culture has sanitized and Disneyfied the Christmas story, putting it further out of reach. The characters in my children's Fisher-Price manger set are all fresh, clean and smiling. The star automatically lights the scene while a carol plays on an endless loop, all light and no shadow. The culture tells me that I should feel nothing but joy at this "most wonderful time of the year," and also that I should buy lots of stuff to shower others with consumer products, while the homeless tap on my car windows on my way home from the university in Washington, D.C. As a Christian, I feel conflicted. I would like to feel enraptured by the celebration of Christ's birth. But how can I while Christians in the Middle East are still persecuted and forced to flee, while the poor still roam with no room at the inn?

Despite the greeting card renditions, Christ's birth is a rather dark story. Reclaiming the darkness of that story can help its light shine on us today. A family is forced to leave home by the decree of a repressive regime. No one opens the door to the poor migrants. Ultimately Mary is forced to give birth amid the smell and dung of animals. Yes, shepherds and wise men pay their respects, but so do the thugs of a power-hungry dictator, who slaughter innocent babies. No cape-clad superhero saves the babies, rights the wrongs, smites the murderers, topples the repressive regime. Instead the members of the Holy Family become refugees, forced to flee because their religious identity and very existence challenge the unjust political order.

What is there to celebrate in this darkness? Emmanuel means "God is with us," not that heaven appears on earth and peace and justice emerge instantly in our time. Instead, the promise of the Incarnation and the insight of Ignatius are that God is with us through it all, in illness, poverty, homelessness, repression, war, in the middle of the night in the most lowly circumstances. God is in all things. His shining light is not extinguished by Herod's dark deeds then or ours today. In a world of seemingly unending darkness, the miracle and wisdom of the Magi were that they noticed and followed the light at all. The heroism of the shepherds was that they recognized God among them, in the most inauspicious circumstances. In the bleating of our daily labors, in the groanings of the night, our challenge is similar: to follow the light no matter how deep the darkness, to recognize the Incarnation and to hear the cry of the tiny divine child.

Maryann Cusimano Love

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE is professor of international relations at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. and author of the children's book *You Are My Miracle.*

PHOTO: REUTERS/BRIAN SNYDER

Republican presidential candidates appear on television monitors during a debate at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, N.H.

A look at the 2007 presidential debates

God and Politics

– BY MATT MALONE –

ADLAI E. STEVENSON WOULD NOT HAVE FARED WELL in the 2007 presidential primary debates, though he was perhaps the greatest American orator of the 20th century. "Religious experience is highly intimate," the two-time presidential candidate once said, "and, for me, ready words are not at hand." Stevenson conducted his 1952 and 1956 presidential campaigns in a different era, when most voters did not like religion and politics to share the same dais.

More than half a century later, one Republican presidential candidate, Ron Paul, has called President George W. Bush's foreign policy "un-Christian." Another Republican

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candidate, Duncan Hunter, has said that God wants a Republican to be president. The Democrat Bill Richardson would like voters to know that his sense of social justice comes from being a Roman Catholic; and Joe Biden, also a Democrat, thinks that "all the prayer in the world will not stop a hurricane."

How is it that we know these things? Our faith is fair game in American politics today. Why? Because George W. Bush used his sincerely held religious beliefs to great effect, marshalling many of his fellow Christians to the polls in two elections in which their votes made a significant difference. The religious base of the Republican Party, though not what it once was, cannot be ignored. And Democrats hope to win the moderate to liberal faith vote captured by Bill Clinton but foolishly ignored by John Kerry.

A review of the transcripts of the 2007 Democratic and Republican debates and candidates' forums can give any voter some idea of what presidential candidates have been saying about faith and politics. Because not everything the candidates have said about faith can be found in these transcripts, and because the same questions about faith were not asked of every candidate at every debate, this review offers a snapshot, not a portrait. But it does afford us a glimpse of what these men and one woman are thinking about faith and politics. And while the questions may no longer surprise us, the answers still might.

God and Republicans

God is no stranger in Republican politics, especially since the 1980s, when the Moral Majority morphed into the Christian Coalition and for a time dramatically changed the tenor of the G.O.P. It is not surprising, then, that faith was mentioned almost immediately in the first Republican presidential debate last spring and in every Republican presidential forum since.

On faith and politics. The Republican candidates spent much time in the 2007 debates walking a fine line between insisting that their faith matters and influences their worldview, and stressing that they will not impose their views on others. Mitt Romney, former governor of Massachusetts, attempted this balance: "This is a nation, after all," he said, "that wants a leader that's a person of faith, but we don't choose our leader based on which church they go to." In other words, the president should be a faithful person, but need not follow any particular faith.

Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee agreed, saying, "I'm not as troubled by a person who has a different faith. I'm troubled by a person who tells me their faith doesn't influence their decisions." For Huckabee, a Baptist preacher, it is important that candidates "be open and honest about" their faith; "it helps explain who we are, what our value systems are, what makes us tick."

But for Governor Huckabee, that openness and honesty

had a limit: When pressed by CNN's Wolf Blitzer on the topic of evolution in another debate, Huckabee suggested his views on the subject were irrelevant: "It's interesting that that question would even be asked of somebody running for president." These two responses reveal the rhetorical tightrope candidates walk: they must speak openly about their faith but avoid any specifics that might get them into trouble.

Former New York City Mayor Rudoph W. Giuliani knows this walk well. A Roman Catholic, Giuliani has long endorsed public policies at odds not only with some of his own personal views (the morality of abortion, for example), but with the teachings of his church and a majority of the Republican Party. Accordingly, in another forum, the current national Republican frontrunner sought to draw a sharper line between faith and politics than most of his opponents: "Religion is very important to me," he said. "But I have been in public office most of my life and taken oaths of office to enforce the law and I've got to make the decisions that I think are the right ones in a country like ours." That he means a secular country is clear from what follows: "I consult my religion, I consult my reading of the Constitution, I consult my views of what I think are important in a pluralistic society."

U.S. Representative Ron Paul of Texas also consults the Constitution, but it leads him to draw an even sharper line between faith and politics than Giuliani. When asked about his views on church and state, he said that "we should write a lot less laws regarding this matter… and we just don't need more laws determining religious things or prayer in school." While Paul acknowledged that he is a Baptist and came "to his God through Christ," he was attempting to appeal to the libertarian sensibilities of Republicans who want smaller government and less intrusion by the public into the private. It remains to be seen whether the defense-oriented and socially conservative elements of the party are willing to hear that message.

Paul's fellow Republican, U.S. Representative Tom Tancredo of Colorado, appeared to have it easier than his colleagues, because for him there was no tightrope walk between faith and politics. A Presbyterian, he told a group of voters in one forum that his faith would directly affect public policy when it came to abortion. When it comes to the unborn, he said, "everybody in my cabinet is going to talk about them as people, as individuals, because that is exactly what they are, because God said to Jeremiah, 'I knew you before you were in the womb….' We have to understand in this nation that regardless of your political persuasion, all the political talk that goes around it, it goes back to this: God said, 'I knew you before you were in the womb.'"

On evolution. Huckabee did have a point: it does seem strange that a presidential candidate would be asked in a debate whether he or she believes in evolution. Yet

Republican Party politics and the skepticism of the mainstream media converged in one debate to make it seem less strange. A sizable part of the Republican base not only believes in creationism; it believes that evolution is a discredited theory that should not be taught in public schools. Add to this a smug media who probably view creationism as quaint if not crazy, and voilà—we have the question from Wolf Blitzer: "Do you believe in evolution?"

U.S. Senator John McCain of Arizona, with a reputation as a straight talker, answered with an emphatic yes. Huckabee indicated he did not believe in evolution, but added nuance in a later debate, saying "I believe whether God did it in six days or whether he did it in six days that represented periods of time, he did it, and that's what's important." McCain also then elaborated on his view. When it came to the teaching of evolution, McCain attempted to appease both the skeptical media and the Republican base: "I believe that all of our children in school can be taught different views on different issues. But I leave the curricula up to the school boards."

America's most pressing moral issue. At their debate in Manchester, N.H., Republican candidates were asked what they thought was America's most pressing moral issue and what they would do about it as president. Not surprisingly, almost all agreed that the most pressing moral issue is the threat to human life. But many pro-lifers in recent years have grown sensitive to the criticism that the only issue that concerns them is abortion, and several of the candidates made it clear that they meant something more by "pro-life" than just opposition to legal abortion. "Many of us who are pro-life, quite frankly, have made the mistake of giving people the impression that pro-life means we care intensely about people as long as that child is in the womb," Huckabee said. "We've not demonstrated...that we respect life at all levels, not just during pregnancy."

In this sense Huckabee, a Baptist, was at least rhetorically in agreement with the U.S. Catholic bishops, who have stressed a broad ethic of life while emphasizing that offenses against the unborn occupy a privileged place. Rudy Giuliani, a Catholic, obviously wanted to give the same answer as Huckabee despite his pro-choice position, and so offered an even more expansive interpretation of the phrase "pro-life." For the former mayor, the greatest moral challenge facing America is transmitting our values "that come to us from God" to the rest of the world, among these being our belief in human rights. Indeed, according to Giuliani, America has a "moral obligation to find the right way to share that with the rest of the world."

Ron Paul emphasized yet another thread in the pro-life seamless garment argument, his opposition to unjust war, saying that the greatest threat to human life is "the acceptance just recently that we now promote pre-emptive war." Paul later amplified this view in another debate: "I believe that there is a Christian doctrine of just war. And I strongly believe this nation has drifted from that.... And I see this as being, in many ways, un-Christian.… What we do in the name of Christianity I think is very dangerous and not part of what Christianity is all about." It is surprising that a major policy of the current Republican president, the most overtly Christian president since Jimmy Carter, would be characterized as un-Christian at a Republican presidential debate. Equally surprising is that the crowd greeted Paul's comment with applause and that not one Republican came to the defense of the Bush doctrine on pre-emptive war. It might indicate that Christian Republicans, who like most Americans have grown weary of the war in Iraq, also have a troubled conscience about the justification for it.

An apocalyptic struggle. Since George W. Bush pledged that America would "rid the world of the evildoers" after 9/11, we have grown accustomed to politicians speaking of the struggle against terrorism as a battle between good and evil. It is interesting to note how far this language now goes, especially in Republican politics, where it may be fueled in part by Christian apocalyptic beliefs. Giuliani castigated the Democrats for not drawing the distinction clearly enough, expressing surprise and dismay that no Democrat in their debates ever uttered the words "radical Islamic terrorism." For John McCain, the "battle against radical Islamic extremism" is "a transcendent struggle between good and evil." Romney said Americans unite over faith, that it is "the people we're fighting, they're the ones who divide over faith."

Huckabee, however, has used the sharpest language to describe the so-called war on terror, calling it, "a theological war. It's not politically correct to say that, it's just the truth. We are fighting people whose religious fanaticism will not be satisfied until every one of us is dead."

Democrats and Faith

Democratic presidential debates featured little such apocalyptic rhetoric. Barack Obama gave one reason for this, saying "the danger of using good versus evil in the context of war is it may lead us to be not as critical as we should be about our own actions." But the Democratic forums also had less talk of faith and God in general. In fact, while God was mentioned almost immediately in the first Republican gathering, it was only after 80 minutes of a 90-minute session that the subject was mentioned in the first Democratic debate; Democrats in the following three forums did not mention faith at all. Democrats are not fluent in God-talk, Carter and Clinton notwithstanding. In 2004 they nominated a candidate, John Kerry, who was clearly uncomfortable airing his religious laundry in public. This sat well with a Democratic party that is sometimes uncomfortable with

talking about both God and politics in the same breath and contains some members openly hostile to organized religion.

The Democratic candidates nevertheless discussed their religious views in a number of debates and forums. Interestingly, in both political parties, the more seemingly extreme the candidate, the more likely he or she was to speak freely about faith and politics. Among Republicans, this meant the more conservative the candidate, the more talk about God and public policy. For the Democrats, it was the maverick liberal Congressman Dennis Kucinich of Ohio who most frequently referred to his spiritual values.

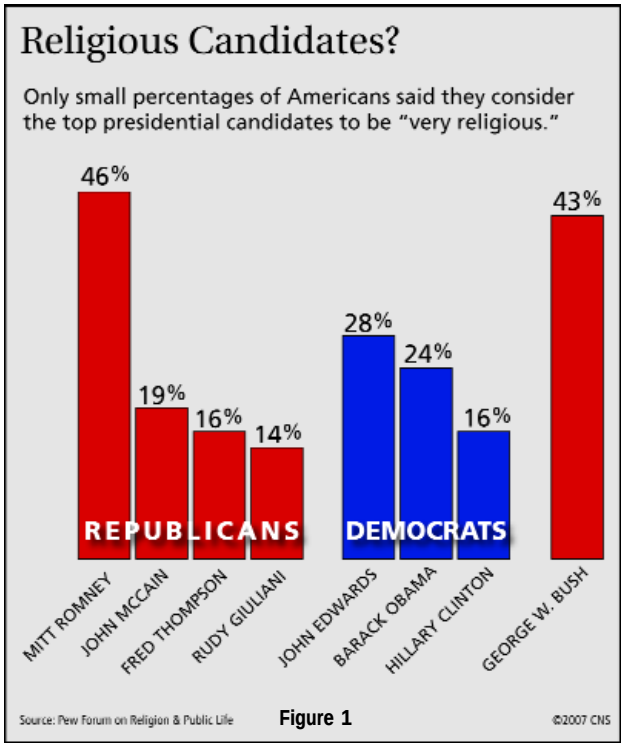

Figure 1

On faith and politics. Kucinich is the only one among the Democratic presidential candidates who supports reparations for slavery for African-Americans, a position that places him on the far left of Democratic politics. His justification for this, as he said somewhat daringly at the Democratic candidates' debate in South Carolina, is the biblical injunction to be "a repairer of the breach." "A breach has occurred" he said. "We have to acknowledge that…. Yes, I am for repairing the breach." Kucinich, a Roman Catholic who has stated he was influenced in his early life by Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, argues that his spiritual values tell him that "we have to have faith but also good works." In one 30-second response, Kucinich quoted from both Matthew and Isaiah, while in another he claimed that he carried the peace prayer of St. Francis of Assisi in his breast pocket to every debate. In a sense, his views are similar to Tancredo's in that he sees no conflict between his faith and his politics and no need for a tightrope walk. "As president," he said, "I'll bring strong spiritual values into the White House." Highest among these values, according to his debate responses, is love. "Love has the transformative power, and that's what I'll bring into the White House," Kucinich said.

Love is also the highest spiritual value for the first Unitarian to run for president since Adlai Stevenson, the former U.S. Senator from Alaska Mike Gravel. "The most important thing in life is love," he said, "that's what empowers courage and courage implements the rest of the virtues." This message could play well with the liberal wing of the party, for whom talk of love is as admirable and unthreatening as mom and apple pie.

Joe Biden, U.S. Senator from Delaware, attempted to draw a slightly sharper distinction between his faith and politics. "Religion informs my values," said Biden, a Roman Catholic, but "reason dictates outcomes. My religion taught me about abuse of power." Biden said that his favorite teacher was the principal of his Norbertine high school: "His name was Justin E. Diny. He was a priest and he taught me that the single most serious sin humanity could commit was abuse of power, and the second most serious sin was standing by and watching it be abused." Accordingly, said Biden, "that's why I moved to write the Violence Against Women Act."

Democratic candidate Barack Obama, a U.S. senator from Illinois, spent much of last summer conducting "faith tours" of churches in Iowa, and also claimed that his spiritual values inform his decision-making. Obama, perhaps even more than the junior senator from New York, Hillary Clinton, is aiming to capture the votes of religiously minded Democrats, especially African-Americans who gave unstinting support to Hillary's husband. Accordingly, he was willing to invoke his faith in debate and also challenged what he perceived as a culture in the Democratic Party that looks askance at religion in the public square. "I am proud of my Christian faith," he said, "and it informs what I do. And I don't think that people of my faith background should be prohibited from debating in the public square."

In an impressive act of political triangulation, Obama then reassured nonbelieving Democrats by saying that while public policy positions may originate in personal religious views, those in public life have an obligation to "translate our religious values into moral terms that all people can share, including those who are not believers." In other words, religious views must be transformed into secular but still moral language that all can speak. In this sense, Obama's position is not entirely unlike that of Giuliani, who argued for a similar translation.

John Edwards had yet another approach. He spoke frequently of the "moral issues" we confront as a people, telling one audience that poverty is the great moral issue of our time. But Edwards was quick to point out that while

God is important to him, and he prays to God every day "for both forgiveness and counsel," it would be "wrong for me to impose my personal faith beliefs on the American people or to decide any kind of decision, policy decision, that will affect America on the basis of my personal faith beliefs." This position is similar to Giuliani's, but rather than using the argument to justify an unpopular position on abortion, as Giuliani did, Edwards invoked the argument to explain that while he was personally opposed to gay marriage, he would still seek to afford gay couples all the rights of marriage through civil unions.

The power of prayer. In a recent poll conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (see Fig. 1), Hillary Clinton was viewed as the least religious top-tier candidate, even though her deep religious faith has been well documented. One reason for the discrepancy may be that she has not been given many opportunities to talk about her faith in the presidential debates.

There may be another reason. Clinton seems uncomfortable talking about the subject. In one forum, she told the audience that she would not have gotten through her husband's infidelity without her faith. But she was not about to elaborate. "I take my faith very seriously and very personally," she said. "And I come from a tradition that is perhaps a little too suspicious of people who wear their faith on their sleeves, so that a lot of the talk about and advertising about faith doesn't come naturally to me.… I keep thinking of the Pharisees."

In another forum, Clinton revealed a bit more. The candidates were asked whether they thought prayer had the power to affect events like Hurricane Katrina or last summer's bridge collapse in Minneapolis. Clinton's response, as is customary for a frontrunner, was cautious and noncommittal. "I don't pretend to understand the wisdom and power of God," she said, "but I have relied on prayer consistently throughout my life.… I am very dependent on faith, and prayer is a big part of it."

Christopher Dodd, U.S. Senator from Connecticut, similarly added that "I would not try to second-guess the Lord's intentions here." The other Democratic candidates were more direct: Biden and Edwards, while both claimed to be men of prayer, flatly said no—prayer cannot influence events in that way. Both men cited times when they prayed during personal tragedies, Biden when his wife and daughter were killed in a car crash and Edwards when his son also died in an auto accident. Edwards captured their sentiments, saying, "I don't think you can prevent bad things from happening through prayer."

Once again, Obama took the middle ground. While prayer may not prevent a hurricane, according to Obama, it could help to "strengthen ourselves in adversity… and also find the empathy and compassion and will to deal with the problems that we do control."

Gravel did not directly answer the question, but offered this insight: "You can pray. I was always struck by the fact that many people who pray are the ones who want to go to war and who want to kill fellow human beings. That disturbs me." Bill Richardson, the governor of New Mexico, was perhaps least comfortable with the question: "I pray, I'm a Roman Catholic. My sense of social justice, I believe comes from being a Roman Catholic. But in my judgment, prayer is personal."

The race in the Democratic Party to capture the votes of believers is on—primarily between Obama and Clinton, who in recent weeks has set up her own "faith tours" in South Carolina. From the responses in these debates, it seems that Obama may have the edge. He is comfortable talking about his religious views but can simultaneously reassure worried Democrats that his religious faith is no threat.

The Meaning of "Imposition"

Most surprising is how much the candidates—both Democrats and Republicans—seemed to have in common. Most of them wanted to claim their faith in the public square, to say that it was important and that it influenced their worldviews. Most of them also wanted to stress that their religious views would not be imposed on anyone. This is where their differences are most stark. The candidates have widely varying opinions on what the meaning of "imposing" is. John Edwards, for instance, thinks poverty is a moral issue, yet his call for new programs to reduce poverty is not, in his view, an imposition. But then why is it an imposition for Edwards to allow his views on the morality of same-sex marriage to influence his positions? On the other hand, for most Republicans, defeating same-sex marriage is not imposing a religious view on Americans, but defending a fundamental institution of Western civilization. For most Democrats, denying same-sex couples the rights accrued by marriage is an unreasonable imposition of a religious view.

Maybe not much has changed since Adlai Stevenson ran for president. According to polls, most Americans do not want politicians making public policy decisions based on religious views. On the other hand, Americans are still asking questions about candidates' views on faith and politics. If there were no market for these questions, the commercial media would probably stop asking them. Perhaps Americans don't mind the questions; maybe what we really mind are the answers, particularly when we disagree with them. A

From the archives: Mary McGrory on the Kennedy campaign trail, from May 21, 1960, at www.americamagazine.org.

I Need Your Help

An imagined bishop asks for advice.

BY GEORGE B. WILSON

THANK YOU for coming. My name is Bishop Pascal. I am the diocesan bishop of Heartlands, and I need your help. Let me first tell you my situation and some of the options that are being proposed to me for dealing with it. Then I'll welcome your suggestions or proposals.

Our diocese has 83 parishes to staff. Until three years ago we were able to supply a priest-pastor for each one. Since then, as a result of deaths, resignations and retirements, the number of our priests capable of active ministry has declined to 76. I need your help in figuring out how to proceed.

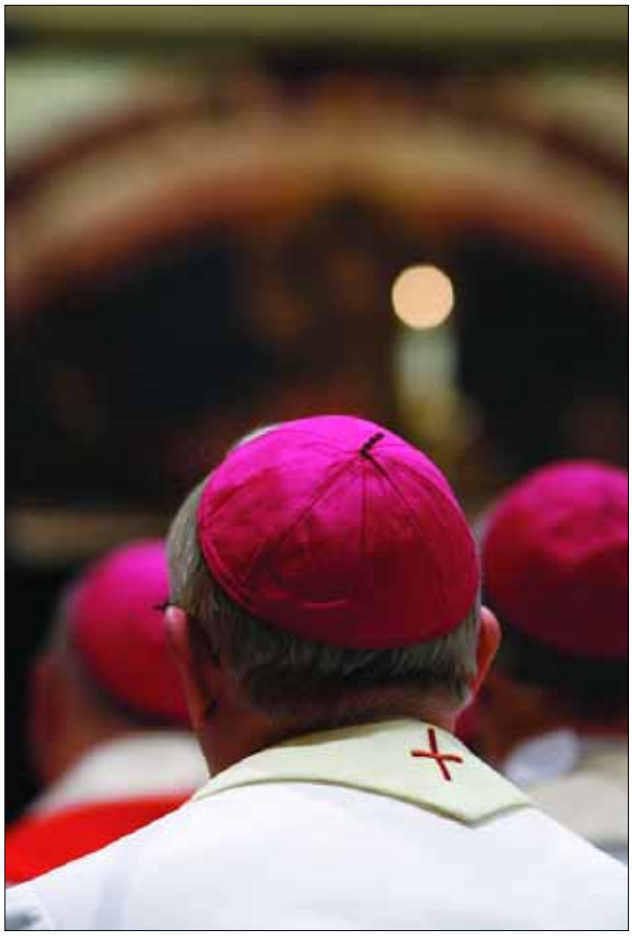

PHOTO: CNS/NANCY WIECHEC

Prayer for Vocations

I am sure many of you will suggest that we begin by storming heaven with prayers for new vocations. And I assure you we have been doing that and we continue to do so. We have had rosary crusades and the Serra Club Chalice Program and "Come and See" visits to our regional seminary. I promote vocations at every confirmation or Boy Scout ceremony I am part of. We are grateful that this past year we were able to ordain two new priests, and we rejoice at the six solid candidates in theology, as well as the 10 men coming along behind them. In the past year, however, we also lost 11 men through death and retirement. The bottom line is that right now our new vocations are not achieving replacement levels.

I believe strongly in the power of prayer and will continue to urge our people to pray for new priests. They want good new priests and support every effort we make in that direction. But I also believe in a God who is present and acting in the realities we confront, using them to transform us and help us to grow. Is it possible that we are getting an answer by the very shortage, that God is challenging us to become a different kind of church? A person of faith once said that God is magnanimous and always gives us the resources we need—whatever those are.

And may I ask you, please, not to use our precious time together to tell me all the ways we've gone wrong, what brought us to this pass. Besides being tiresome, these lamentations aren't very helpful, are they? I've got decisions to make. Real communities have immediate sacramental needs to be addressed right now. We haven't the luxury of paralysis by analysis.

The 'Big' Options

Some of you might propose that we begin right now to expand the pool of those eligible for ordination.

The options under that heading are easily named. Each one would involve challenging beliefs that have shaped our church's way of ministering for centuries. Ordain married men? That would call us to rethink a longstanding commitment to a celibate priesthood. Although the practice is not a matter of faith but of church discipline and remains within the province of the pope to change, many even of our

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Protestant brothers and sisters caution us against assuming that you just say, "Let's ordain married men," rub a magic lamp three times, and—voilà!—the Parousia arrives. Ordain women? That would call us to challenge a belief that Pope John Paul II considered a matter of faith: that Jesus' calling only male apostles constitutes a norm that binds the church forever, regardless of cultural changes across the centuries. Bring resigned priests back to active ministry? That would challenge our understanding of choices once made and raise issues of fairness, as if the priesthood were a matter of an individual's personal sense of calling rather than a call by the church community. What about time-conditioned celibacy, along the lines of Shinto priesthood—celibate service for 7 years and then return to the lay state? That would challenge long-held beliefs about the lifelong commitment required by the model of Jesus' life.

I do see some kind of potential in each of these options, but I call them "the big options" for two reasons: one, they fall within the compass of the church's universal authority, way beyond my pay grade and, two, because even if they were to be adopted it would take years to think through all their consequences and develop reasonable plans for implementing them before they would be ready to "meet the road." Mind you, I'm not averse to bringing up their possibility in discreet circles—I did get off the ladder long ago. I happen to like our diocese and am happy to stay where I am, thank you—but I've got decisions to make in the coming year—some, in fact, that I probably should have made five years ago.

Possible Strategies

So let's just keep those conversations going in the background, shall we? What are my options in the immediate future? And what beliefs might each of those options challenge?

Close parishes. In one sense this is the easiest option to carry out, administratively. But what does it do to our belief that once formed, a faith community is not just a branch office of the diocese, just as a diocese is not a branch office of the universal church. (How would my brother bishops react to the notion of closing a diocese?) A parish is rather a unique incarnation of the body of Christ in a particular piece of geography. How is the "easy" choice for closure to be reconciled with the dignity of such a gathering of the faithful? The parishes being considered for closure will probably be those with fewer parishioners than the rest of the parishes in the diocese, but is the mere fact of smaller or larger numbers a criterion Jesus would find apt? Closing a parish may gain me a priest who can provide sacramental services for a parish with more parishioners, but what does that say about our concept of priesthood? There was, after all, a time in the church when it would have been unthinkable to ordain a man for service unattached to a diocese; the validity of his

ordination was tied into lifelong service of a particular faith community, analogous to the connection symbolized by a bishop's ring: that he was to be married for life to a single diocese.

Appoint a layperson as pastoral agent of the parish. I've seen wonderful men and women give excellent leadership to parish communities, as effective as any ordained priest, frankly—theologically, spiritually and pastorally. But that reality doesn't really help us with the directly sacramental needs. Liturgical presiding, absolution and sacramental anointing require an ordained priest. The number of regular weekend liturgies does not necessarily decrease, and the pastoral agent still has to call for help from a sacramental minister who comes in to the parish from elsewhere. What does that do to our belief that effective sacramental liturgy needs to be acculturated, to issue from the unique faith life of a particular embodied community with its own integrated leadership?

Import priests from other priest-rich parts of the world. Several of my brother bishops are pursuing this strategy. It does meet the goal of a quick replenishment of priest-presiders to lead the liturgies needed, but so far the results appear to be mixed at best. The idea that every priest was cut from the same cookie-cutter and you could just substitute one for another, with no regard for issues of cultural sensitivity, runs counter to the rich development of eucharistic theology over the past 35 years. Do we want to risk returning to a mechanistic understanding that as long as the rite is performed validly, that's all that matters?

Loosen the connection between a particular day of the week, Sunday, and the community's weekly public gathering around the table of the Lord. I have recently heard of dioceses in Europe where a priest is assigned as sacramental minister to as many as six parishes. On Sunday he presides at liturgy in one of them; on Monday evening in another, on Tuesday in another and so on. The people in each of those communities view that midweek liturgy as their central act of worship for the week—fulfilling the Sunday obligation, if you will. An arrangement like that challenges our identification of Sunday with the Lord's day. On the other hand, I have to ask myself: did our church already fracture that identification when it introduced Saturday night Mass?

Cut back the number of Masses. In some communities pastors have tried so hard to accommodate the desires of their people that too many Masses of convenience have come to be expected. Add multiple Saturday wedding Masses and, at times, many priests find themselves violating canonical prescriptions concerning the number of Masses a priest may celebrate on a weekend. I can mandate reducing the numbers, but of itself that won't be sufficient to deal with the communities where I will need to find presiders in the coming years.

Introduce regular use of the ritual officially called Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest. Midweek Communion services are common in many parts of the country now. The church permits and has created officially sanctioned rituals for this kind of a service. I can inform my priests that when they have a sound reason—vacation, retreat, study program or the like—to be absent from their parish over a weekend, they are not to scramble around trying to find replacements but have a trained layperson conduct such a service. Does this practice risk treating the reception of Communion as something separable from the sacrifice of the Mass? Do we want to take that risk? Anecdotal evidence has people remarking that they like Sister Elaine's "Mass" more than Father O'Toole's.

YOU SEE, WHICHEVER OPTION I ACTUALLY CHOOSE—and I must make a choice—challenges some conviction that has shaped our identity as Catholic Christians for a long time. If we aren't willing to challenge any of them, we will just continue trying to do what we have always done, and our situation will become more and more stressful. My question to you is painful but simple: which traditional conviction do you want me to challenge this year?

Turn your chairs to form small circles and share your ideas. After a half hour our facilitator will collect your responses. Thank you. And please pray for the people of the Heartlands Diocese. A

Matthew's Story

The fourth in a series for Advent and Christmas

BY KAREN SUE SMITH

IN MATTHEW'S STORY of the birth of Jesus, we learn that we can now put away fear and replace it with joy, because the promised one of God has come to live among us. Like any good writer, Matthew does not merely assert this major theme of his; he shows us what it means in the lives of different characters.

Take Joseph. His wedding plans have just crashed; Mary, he has learned, is pregnant. We know that Joseph is full of anxiety, despite his plan to "put Mary away quietly," because as he sleeps, an angel in a dream tells him, "Don't be afraid."

The admonition not to give in to fear is an important sign of divine authenticity. Dreams and supernatural experiences must be tested by one's faith. Faith affirms, for example, that God lights up darkness, binds up wounds, feeds the hungry, frees captives and gathers people together. God is in the business of casting out fear, not stirring it up. Therefore, Joseph can trust an angel who says, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife."

There is more. God's Spirit has come upon Mary and she has conceived the child, the angel says—startlingly mysterious information that forces Joseph to reinterpret his situation. When the angel tells Joseph to name the child "Jesus," which means "deliverer," "savior," "helper," Joseph, a devout Jew, can begin to make the messianic connection. The child is also known as Emmanuel ("God is with us"). A miraculous conception gives Joseph (and generations of readers of Matthew's Gospel) an understanding that Jesus is no ordinary child, but God's long-awaited one. Throughout his Gospel, Matthew does everything he can to reveal Jesus' full identity as the Messiah. It is his primary purpose in writing.

We see other signs of divine authenticity in this birth story. Joseph's deepened understanding of who Jesus is informs his actions, not just his understanding. Rather than separating from Mary as he had planned, Joseph weds her and serves as a "father" to Jesus. And as Joseph understands that God's Spirit is with him and his betrothed, he sees Mary's identity shift before him; then his own identity changes.

What does Matthew's story mean for us? If we believe the promised one of God is among us, how does that affect any fears we may have this Christmas? Do we experience God's Spirit present with us? Such questions may merit a few moments of Advent reflection. At issue is learning to trust God's Spirit, which transcends fear.

Matthew also shows what happens when fear gets the better of someone. Take King Herod. When Magi from the East arrive at his court and ask for the "king of the Jews," Herod takes note. He is frightened, threatened by an infant-king whose birth has summoned astrologers. Fear motivates Herod to conspire to kill the babe. When his plot fails, Herod, enraged and even more fearful, orders the slaughter of every newborn male in his realm. Fear incites irrational violence—so many innocent deaths to eliminate a single competitor.

The murder of the innocents serves a narrative function as well, foreshadowing Jesus' own fate. The Magi's reference to Jesus as "king of the Jews" is another foreshadowing. We hear it again in Matthew 27, when an adult Jesus on trial for his life stands before Pilate. The child the wise men seek will become that prisoner.

Skillfully, Matthew brings his readers full circle. At every turn fear seems reasonable enough, and the plot is hair-raising. One would hope that a boy saved by his family's flight into Egypt might withstand a trial for blasphemy, but flogging and a public execution are his lot. Only after that is fear shown to be hollow.

A few days after his crucifixion, Jesus appears to several women gathered at his tomb. To them he says exactly what the angel told Joseph, "Do not be afraid." In coming back to his opening dialogue, Matthew is showing his readers (and us) that this Jesus, whom God has just raised up from the dead, is the crucified rabbi; the dynamic preacher, teacher and healer so many had followed; the one whose coming had been anticipated by the Jews for centuries. Their hopes were not misplaced: he is the child Joseph named "deliverer" and whose birth the heavens pointed out with a star. This is the infant who was feared by a king, worshiped by Magi and reared by a humble, faith-filled man and woman. In the final words of his Gospel, Matthew harks back to Emmanuel ("God with us"), who as the risen one now tells his disciples, "I am *with you always*, to the end of the age." A

ART BY JULIE LONNEMAN

KAREN SUE SMITH is the editorial director of **America**.

The Genealogy of Jesus

Shadows and lights in his past

BY ROBERT P. MALONEY

EVERY YEAR during Advent, we hear Matthew's account of the genealogy of Jesus: "A family record of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez..." (Mt 1:1-17). Few readings seem more boring, as the lector goes on and on, reciting 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 more from David to the Babylonian Exile, and 14 more from the Exile to Christ.

But Matthew's symmetrical genealogy is much subtler than one might think. For one thing, contrary to the patriarchal mentality of the time, Matthew has inserted four women into the long list of men—a fascinating innovation. None of these women's names—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba—are found in Luke's genealogy. Who are these women? Why are they there? What do they tell us about Advent?

Who are they?

Matthew's readers, who knew the Hebrew Scriptures well, must certainly have been jolted at finding Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba on the list. They might even have been embarrassed, especially when they saw Tamar's name. The Book of Genesis (38:15) recounts that she pretended to be a harlot and seduced her father-in-law, Judah. The twins born of their illicit union, Perez and Zerah, are two of the names Matthew lists.

The first-century Christians whom Matthew addressed probably had mixed but considerably more favorable reactions to the inclusion of Rahab on the list. She was a prostitute, as the Book of Joshua attests (Jos 2:1), but the New Testament praises her for her faith and good works (Heb 11:31 and Jas 2:25). She hid the Israelite spies who had infiltrated Jericho, thus facilitating the capture of the city. When the walls came tumbling down (Jos 6:20), only Rahab and her family were spared. We know nothing about Salmon, whom Matthew lists in Jesus' genealogy as the father of her child, but one wonders whether he might have been one of her clients.

Of the four women, Ruth comes off the best in the Scriptures. All of us recall the wonderful fidelity of this foreigner to her Jewish mother-in-law. Rather than abandon Naomi, Ruth declares: "Wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God. Wherever you die I will die and there be buried" (Ru 1:16-17). So Ruth accompanies Naomi from the Plains of Moab to Bethlehem where her mother-in-law introduces her to a relative named Boaz, whom she weds. The child of this mixed marriage, Obed, becomes the grandfather of David the king.

By far the most shocking woman, both to Matthew's contemporaries and to us today, is the fourth in the genealogy. Matthew does not mention her name, describing her simply as Uriah's wife. The infamous Bathsheba, as readers will remember, committed adultery with David, who, in an attempt to make Uriah think that the child in Bathsheba's womb was his own, called her husband back from battle and tried to induce him to have sexual relations with her. When Uriah abstained, David had him murdered (2 Sam 11:11). After mourning her husband's death briefly (2 Sam 11:26), Bathsheba quickly took up residence with David and gave birth to their child, who died almost immediately. Their second child was Solomon, renowned for his wisdom. But Solomon, heedless of the Lord's admonition (1 Kgs 11:1ff), chased after countless foreign women. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines, the Book of Kings tells us, and they turned his heart away from the God of Israel. It is his name, from among David's children, that appears on the list of Jesus' ancestors.

Why are these figures included?

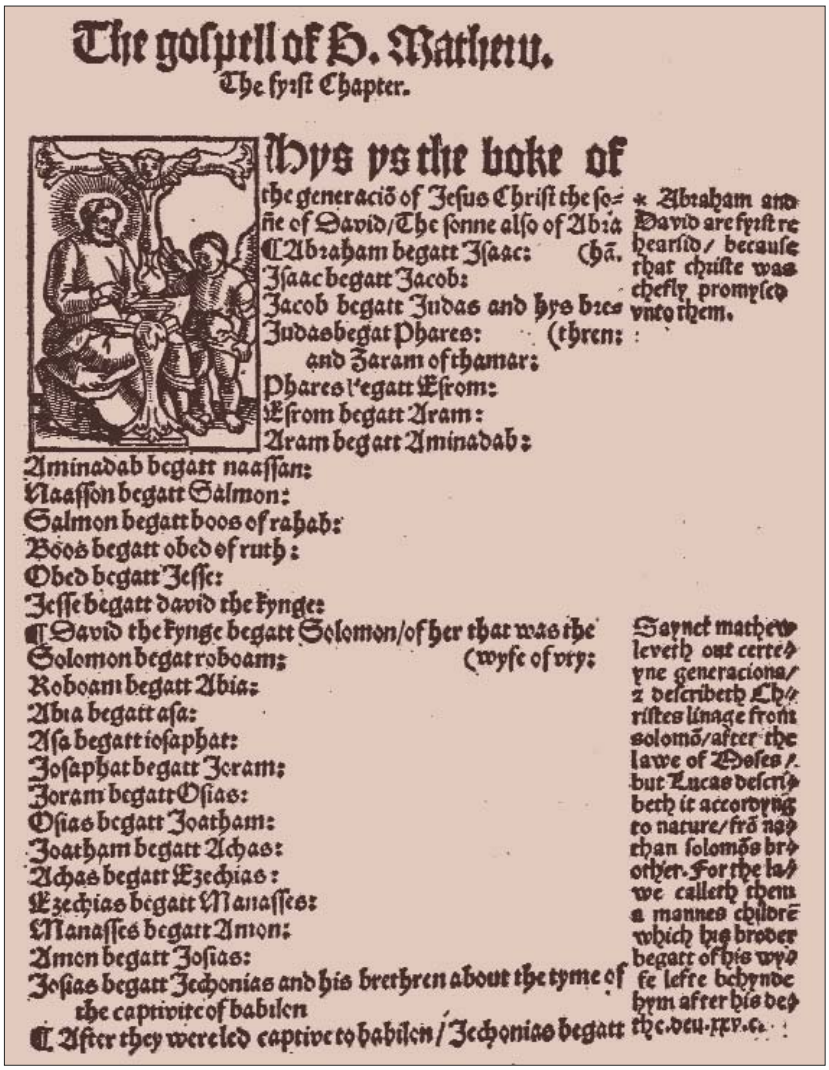
By including these notable women in Jesus' genealogy, Matthew is teaching us that it is the Spirit of God that guides human history. God uses the unexpected to bring an unfolding plan to fulfillment. History is not a linear series of events leading to predictable outcomes. It involves sin and conversion, success and failure, heroes and villains. But God is at work in it, making crooked ways straight and rough ways smooth. And ultimately, God's love prevails, a truth revealed in the person and life of Jesus.

Matthew seems to have a second motive for inserting these four women into the otherwise all-male genealogy: They are all Gentiles. Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites, Ruth a Moabite, and Bathsheba was probably a Hittite. Their presence on the list foreshadows the role of the Messiah, who opens God's saving plan to the Gentiles. Matthew is saying that just as Gentiles are part of Jesus' lineage, they are part of his future.

ROBERT P. MALONEY, C.M., the former superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, lives in Washington, D.C., and serves as administrator for DREAM, a joint project of the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Daughters of Charity for combating AIDS in Africa.

What does it mean?

Matthew's genealogy shows us that trust in providence is one of the keystones of spirituality. This is a central theme in Matthew's Gospel, introduced right from the beginning of the infancy narratives. Jesus is named Emmanuel, that is, "God is with us" (Mt 1:23). Matthew is assuring us that God governs history and that nothing eludes God's power, that there is a guiding plan, beyond our comprehension, which gives meaning to life's events. He is encouraging us to stand with reverent trust before the mystery of God, as revealed in Christ.



The gospell of S. Mathew.
The fyrst Chapter.

Hys ys the boke of the generacio of Jesus Christ the sone of David/The sonne also of Abia
¶ Abraham begatt Jsaac: Cha.
Jsaac begatt Jacob:
Jacob begatt Judas and hys bre
Judas begat Phares: (thren:
and Zaram of thamar:
Phares begatt Esrom:
Esrom begatt Aram:
Aram begatt Aminadab:
Aminadab begatt naasson:
Naasson begatt Salmon:
Salmon begatt boos of rahab:
Boos begatt obed of ruth:
Obed begatt Jesse:
Jesse begatt david the kynge:
¶ David the kynge begatt Solomon/of her that was the
Solomon begat roboam: (wyfe of vry:
Roboam begatt Abia:
Abia begatt asa:
Asa begatt iosaphat:
Josaphat begatt Jeram:
Joram begatt Osias:
Osias begatt Joatham:
Joatham begatt Achas:
Achas begatt Ezechias:
Ezechias begatt Manasses:
Manasses begatt Amon:
Amon begatt Josias:
Josias begatt Jechonias and his brethren about the tyme of
the captivite of babilon
¶ After they were led captive to babilon/Jechonias begatt

* Abraham and David are fyrst rehearsid/ because that chiste was chefly promysed vnto them.

Saynct mathew leveth out certeyne generacions/ & describeth Christes linage from solomō/after the lawe of Moses/ but Lucas describeth it accordyng to nature/frō nathan solomōs brother. For the lawe calleth them a mannes childrē which hys broder begatt of his wyfe lefte behynde hym after his deth the.deu.xxv.c.

FIRST PAGE OF ST MATTHEW'S GOSPEL FROM WILLIAM TYNDALE'S ENGLISH NEW TESTAMENT, 1525. ©HIP/ART RESOURCE

Matthew is sharing his faith with us. He sees God working through Tamar's seduction of her father-in-law, through the collusion of Rahab the harlot with Israel's spies, through Ruth the Moabite's unexpected union with Boaz the Jew, through David and Bathsheba's adultery. Writing in an uncertain time for the early Christians, Matthew is expressing his trust in God's "hidden plan" (Col 2:2-3), even though he and his readers have experienced the fall of Jerusalem, the persecution of the newborn church and the death of many fellow believers. He tells us that trust in providence is the key to finding meaning in the polarities of human existence: light and darkness, grace and sin, peace and violence, plan and disruption, health and sickness, life and death.

The saints have all known this truth. The great saint of charity, Vincent de Paul, wrote to a friend in 1648: "We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor, in the arms of providence, and with genuine renouncement of ourselves in order to follow Jesus Christ." Even though he was struggling to help the starving and the wounded who were dying by the thousands in an endless war in the French countryside, he was utterly convinced that for those who love God, "all things work together for good" (Rom 8:28). He told his closest collaborator, Louise de Marillac: "In the name of God, let us not be surprised at anything. God will do everything for the best."

So, with Matthew, the church encourages us this Advent to ponder the mystery of providence, both in our own lives and in the wider history of humanity today. Do we trust deeply that a loving, personal God guides each of us as well as the tragic events of contemporary history? That is surely an enormous challenge as we experience war, terrorism and poverty.

This Advent the church asks us to lift up our eyes toward the ends of the earth and to embrace the universalism that Matthew subtly introduces in the genealogy. In the infancy narratives Matthew continues this theme with the story of the magi, Gentiles who come from the East to adore the newborn Lord. And he concludes his Gospel with the rousing universal missionary mandate: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you and know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!" (Mt 28:18-20).

Strikingly, this farewell command combines the two themes that the evangelist introduced so creatively into the infancy narratives: providence ("I am with you") and universalism ("all nations").

By highlighting Jesus' universal mission, Matthew's genealogy poses some penetrating questions today. Do we remain insulated, as Matthew feared was the case for many of his readers? Are we so caught up in our own families or our own work that we rarely raise our eyes to the larger world of the poor on other continents? Do we sense ourselves as members of a worldwide family? Do we live in active solidarity with those who are needier than we are, reaching out to them with both affective and effective love, and sharing with them some portion of our material goods?

Matthew's account of Jesus' genealogy poses a number of challenges this Advent. It reminds us to make Advent a time of peaceful trust in God's providence and to make Christmas a celebration in which we open our eyes, minds and hearts to the universal call of the newborn Lord. A

What a Difference a Generation Makes

After the Baby Boomers

How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion

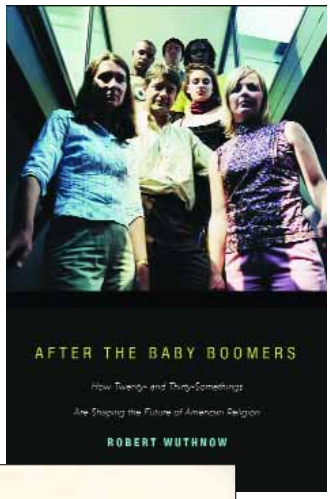
By Robert Wuthnow

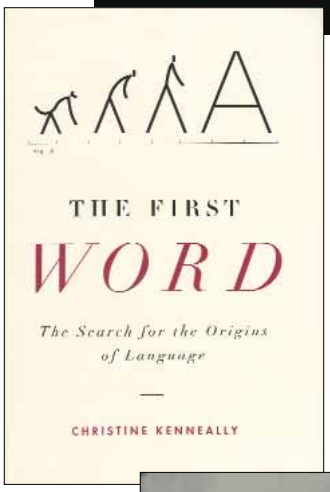
Princeton Univ. Press. 312p $29.95
ISBN 9780691127651

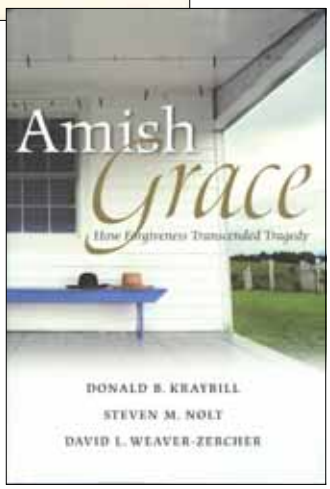
There has been a great deal of anecdotal speculation about religious proclivities and spiritual seeking among so-called Generation X, the children of the baby boomers. Robert Wuthnow, a professor of sociology and director of the Center for the Study of American Religion at Princeton University, takes us beyond mere speculation to compellingly firm data. Drawing on an exceedingly rich archival data set of 16 major research studies over the past three decades, Wuthnow compares young Americans age 20 to 45 to the baby boomers when they were that age in the 1970s. The shifts are in many ways startling and not necessarily promising or benign for organized religion.

Here are some of the most salient differences between the two groups. The 105.3 million young Americans (20-45) are less likely to attend church regularly than did their parents' generation at the same age. A growing proportion declare themselves to be non-religious and, significantly, many more were born and raised outside of religion. More teenagers and young adults are sexually active now than in the generation of the 1970s, and more have been raised by single parents. A smaller percentage of young adults are active members of congregations (pretty much across the board denominationally) than a generation ago. Young adults change jobs more than they did a generation ago and such early job insecurities feed into their postponement of marriage and having children.

The crucial difference is that young Americans are postponing marriage longer, putting off having children until later, and are likely to have fewer children than their parents. There are more "never married" in the 20-45 group today than there were in the 1970s (and the never or not yet married are less likely to attend church than the other group, the baby boomers, did when they were young adults). More do not have children when married. A greater ideological polarization is also evident: a majority (54 percent) of young adults declare themselves to be very conservative or very liberal, more so than two decades ago. More than before, church attendees believe and hold moral attitudes sharply diverging from the infrequent attendees or the unchurched.







Wuthnow's data remind us that religious involvement, now as before, is influenced more by whether people are married, when they get married, whether they have children and how many children they have than by almost anything else. The married without children and those with children are all more likely to be church members, to be more active in attendance and to be more orthodox in beliefs and practices.

After the Baby Boomers is replete with data and careful analysis and comparisons among: 1) those who are religiously committed and those who are not; and 2) Catholics, mainline Protestants and evangelicals among mainline Protestant denominations. Young adults now represent half of their proportion from three decades ago; the percentage of young adults in evangelical congregations is also down from 30 years ago; 3) Hispanic versus non-Hispanic Catholics; 4) the characteristics of vital youthful congregations (where at least 35 percent of the congregation is 35 years or younger) versus older congregations.

When all this rich and vast data has been laid out, Wuthnow mounts two main arguments. First, he acknowledges there is a kind of institutional surrounding of support for young Americans aged 1-21— parental guidance; day care; schools; welfare programs; family counseling programs; job training; and colleges (with campus ministry). But after 21, in that crucial period when young adults are making life-shaping decisions about getting married, having children and pursuing a career, we provide almost no institutional supports. As Wuthnow notes:

> Nearly all the major decisions a person has to make about marriage, child rearing and work happen after these support systems have ceased to function. This is not a good way to run a society. No wonder young adults experience stress and confusion, worry that they are not yet capable of behaving

The Reviewers

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like adults, delay settling down, and often make bad decisions about jobs and money.

The second conclusion is that religious congregations have not done a very good job in attracting and finding out the spiritual needs of the unchurched group of young adults (or irregular attendees). Sociological evidence suggests that religion has far more beneficial than harmful effects. For regular church attendees, it helps to discourage teenagers from using drugs and helps parents be better mothers and fathers and keep marriages intact.

It would be hard to fault Wuthnow's contention that American congregations need to focus more intentionally on ministries to young adults (instead of investing so heavily in programs for children, parents and the elderly). Religious leaders need to reflect much more seriously on what might attract more young adults to church. ***John A. Coleman***

'Madam, I'm Adam' and So On

The First Word

The Search for the Origins of Language

By Christine Kenneally
Viking. 368p $26.95
ISBN 9780670034901

Of all the dizzying questions devised, "How did language begin?" has to rank near the top. Humans plainly learn to speak by imitation, but back in the beginning who was there to imitate? We can't talk without a vocabulary and syntax—but where did they come from? All the earlier hominids have long since disappeared, and writing is only 6,000 years old; so how can we ever get a handle on the way Homo sapiens pulled off the most electrifying trick in history? The bad news is we will never fully fathom this mysterious process (and some scholars would even now deny that it was a process, as opposed to a fabulous one-time quantum leap). The good news, thanks to the labors of myriad researchers in linguistics, anthropology, genetics, comparative biology, animal behavior, paleontology, etc., is that we now know far more than we did a few decades ago; and the stream of information, however roiled by controversy, is getting richer every day.

This complex but absorbing story is wonderfully told by Christine Kenneally, a Ph.D. by training (linguistics, Cambridge University) but a journalist by trade. She has also interviewed many of its protagonists, which adds some personal color to what might otherwise have been dry sections on the learned-journal fisticuffs between Noam Chomsky and the evolutionists. Actually, those parts still are a bit dry; but the irreducibly fascinating big issues remain.

First of all, what is language anyway? Is it a sort of computer program hardwired into us? Do we have a "universal grammar" (Chomsky), with rules that "can generate the syntax of every human language"? Does it have a "core"? Or is it a messy accumulation of motor skills and acquired habits that developed, like practically everything else in the human repertoire, by accident? Is it less like an operating system and more like a virus ("a nonconscious life form that evolves independently of the animals infected by it"—we'll admit, won't we, that language is "infectious"?)

Despite long resistance by the Chomskyites, more or less everyone now acknowledges that language has evolved (some hard-liners insist that lately it has stopped evolving). But from what? Gestures would seem to be a sensible starting point, and we can study them as well as the stunning variety of vocalizations in our simian cousins and more distant animal and avian relatives. Kenneally reviews a whole batch of discoveries about a number of prodigious non-human "talkers," from the garrulous Alex, an African gray parrot (recently deceased) to Koko, the gorilla, Kanzi, the bonobo, and Hoover, the snarky harbor seal who greets visitors to the New England Aquarium with the equivalent of "Hey, hey you, get outta there!"

Earlier critics tended to dismiss such achievements as a combination of rote mimicry by the animals and unconscious cues from their handlers; but a growing body of evidence shows that beasts can indeed learn to play language games—and do some thinking while they're at it. Scientists are now revising the hitherto demeaning concept of the bird-brain as they observe, for instance, a "language-less" New Caledonian crow named Betty snatch up and engineer a strip of wire into a hook with which she can pull up a bucket of sliced meat. No animal, either in the lab or the wild, has ever managed to perform the human feat of taking chunks of language and using them to fashion truly novel statements. But at least animal studies are shedding light on how the pressure to survive promotes a kind of communication that is "indexical," if not yet symbolic (like various monkey or meerkat cries warning of nearby predators).

The questions just keep piling up. Human speech is impossible without a closely integrated network of vocal and cortical structures; but how exactly did they come into being? (Fossilized remains are a help here.) And how do we trace the "co-evolution" of brain and language (or other constructs)? When our ancestors, the australopithecines, for example, began using flaked stone tools, that leap forward helped to make their environment far more promising for such tool-making behavior and for the brainier tool-makers, who then got to pass on their genes more than the competition. Throw a practically unlimited amount of time into the mix, and you're cooking. Text-messaging, here we come.

Reading about a science, or a family of sciences, still in its youth (we knew next to nothing about the life of the wild apes until Jane Goodall came along) is bound to have its frustrations. One has barely latched on to a new notion—that Broca's area is the supreme "word processor" in the brain—than one has to revise it radically (language is much more diffusely controlled). But you could hardly ask for a livelier or better-informed guide than Kenneally, who has taken her extraordinary teaching talent out of the classroom and into the world. She writes clearly and cogently; she does justice to competing theories; and she supplies a plethora of delicious details. Who knew that dolphins began all their "conversations" with unique signature whistles that identify themselves?

For all the fresh data, the uncanniness persists. We can—and must—multiply descriptions and metaphors (it is all we

have); but we cannot nail language down. As Nietzsche said in *Human, All Too Human*, in language "humans placed a world all their own next to the other one, a place they took to be so solid that they could brace themselves on it, lift the other world off its hinges, and be lords over it." What this meant in fact, Kenneally reminds us, is that we inhabit a multiverse, as we live simultaneously in at least two worlds. It is more than a little irritating that our Archimedean ground is not so solid after all, but it's also deeply enigmatic and exciting. ***Peter Heinegg***

A Radical Act

Amish Grace

How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy

By Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt and David L. Weaver-Zercher

Jossey-Bass/Wiley. 256p $24.95

ISBN 9780787997618

On Oct. 2, 2006, the unthinkable occurred. Ten Amish girls were gunned down in a schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania.

A community known for its gentleness, religious faithfulness and rejection of modern technological society had been severely violated. As astonishing as this story was, what followed captured the attention of the country even more. Within six hours of the shooting, Amish leaders reached out to family members of the killer, Charles Carl Roberts IV, and let them know that they forgave him.

Some skeptics thought the Amish to be too innocent to understand the realities of the world, where revenge is a commonly accepted response. Others thought the Amish too quick and maybe disingenuous in forgiving so soon. To forgive a murderer for this crime seemed beyond human, they thought.

The authors of *Amish Grace*, who are scholars of Amish life, culture and spirituality, compiled this book in a very short time to address such questions about why the Amish acted as they did. They divide the book into three parts. In the first part, they set the scene and tell the story of the shooting. Then they discuss Amish spirituality and answer questions that were raised about the authenticity of the community's faith response. Finally, they reflect on the meaning of forgiveness for the Amish as a witness to non-Amish Americans.

To the Amish this act of forgiveness was not a surprise. It was as much a part of their spirituality as breathing. Their tradition of forgiveness is a heritage from their 300-year-old history, during which their ancestors, the Anabaptists, were persecuted and tortured by Catholic and Protestant religious authorities who objected to their belief in a second baptism. Those Anabaptist martyrs forgave their persecutors even as they were burning at the stake—and just as Jesus did during his crucifixion.

The Amish accept the limits of their humanity and recognize its capacity to commit evil or misguided deeds. Thus, a typical Amish attitude about forgiveness is that "we have to forgive others so that God will forgive us."

Forgiveness is a way of keeping their small community together when a hurt is done either inadvertently or deliberately, especially since they live together most of

their lives. Their practice of humility, submission and patience "provides them with an enormous capacity to absorb adversity, forgo revenge and carry on—gracefully." Consequently, forgiveness opens everyone to grace; and when grace unfolds, everyone and everything is changed. For the Nickel Mines community, that grace included the mourners, the family of the perpetrator, the victims' families and the community. In this highly publicized story, even hard-core skeptics were moved to awe and admiration of the Amish.

Forgiveness is by no means easy, even for the Amish. They understand that it is fundamental to their spirituality and must be extended to others continuously—just as Jesus said, "seventy times seven." The Lord's Prayer in particular encapsulates the substance of their faith and spirituality. "Thy will be done," means "submitting to God's perfect will" rather than fighting or striving against God.

The community's leaders, for example, went to the killer's home to offer them reassurance that they held no ill will toward them for what Roberts had done. Such a visit was a ritual obligation; but the community, including the families of the victims, continued contact with the Roberts family. They did this because they recognized that living together in the same small community of Nickels Mines required it.

The Amish are not fatalistic. They believe in free will and know that people make choices. Roberts's attack on the schoolgirls was not God's will; Roberts made an evil choice. Likewise, people can respond to such a tragedy either by forgiving the perpetrator or carrying out vengeful retaliation. If one chooses the former, the gift of God's grace may unfold and compassion be aroused. If one chooses the latter, there is bitterness for life.

This attitude toward free will does not mean that individuals in the Amish community did not suffer after the deaths of the schoolgirls. It did not prevent the other children from having bad dreams or keep the families of the dead girls from grieving. It did mean, however, that the community acted together through forgiveness and then trusted that God would give them the grace of seeing some good from the tragedy.

It is important to note that the Amish do not condone bad behavior or seek to relieve offenders from the consequences of their crimes or indiscretions. They leave punishment for crimes of violence to the state. So if Charles Roberts had lived, the community would have expected the state to punish him for his crime—but the community still would have forgiven him. They were unconcerned with God's judgment of him.

Amish Grace is academic in tone and structure and a bit dry. In many ways it reads like a primer on Amish life and spirituality, but it engages the reader and provides a convincing and comprehensive study of the dynamics of forgiveness. Authentic faith is difficult to achieve. The outstanding example of forgiveness by the Amish community of Nickel Mines—typical of Amish communities—gives us hope that human beings can in fact transcend the tragedies in their lives without revenge.

Throughout, the authors prompt readers to reflect on and expand their own capacity for forgiveness. In these days of war and retaliation, what an incredible grace the Amish have given us.

Olga Bonfiglio

Classifieds

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Positions

DIRECTOR OF PASTORAL FORMATION is sought for Saint Meinrad School of Theology. The Director of Pastoral Formation oversees all areas of pastoral formation for Saint Meinrad School of Theology's seminary formation program. Responsibilities include: arranging ministry placements and ministry supervisors for seminarians in a two-year philosophy (pre-theology) program and a four-year theology program, conducting workshops for seminarians and supervisors, coordinating learning agreements, serving as a liaison to pastoral placements (both summer and yearlong pastoral internships), organizing theological reflection groups, guiding seminarians through the C.P.E. application process and arranging oncampus interviews, preparing pastoral formation workshops and preparing and overseeing the yearly budget in the area of pastoral formation. The Director of Pastoral Formation reports to the Vice Rector of the seminary and serves on evaluation and formation teams. The candidate should be a Roman Catholic priest in good standing. Other qualifications include: experience in the area of seminary formation and familiarity with the *Program for Priestly Formation* and other U.S.C.C.B. guidelines for pastoral formation; experience in parish ministry and the ability to work with parish priests and staffs; a doctoral degree (preferably in the area of catechetics or pastoral care); proven organizational, teaching and supervisory skills. Curriculum vitae should be submitted with a letter of application and three professional references to: Denis Robinson, O.S.B., Search Committee Chair, Saint Meinrad School of Theology, 200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad, IN, 47577. Questions may be directed to the same or e-mailed to drobinson@saintmeinrad.edu. The review of applications will begin on Jan. 8, 2008.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford, serving 213 parishes in central Connecticut, and its Office of Urban Affairs, located in New Haven, is seeking a full-time Social Action Director. The successful candidate will provide leadership to a FT/PT staff of eight to ensure that the mission and the goals, objectives and advocacy issues established by the Board of Directors are developed and implemented. Must have knowledge of the Roman Catholic faith. A master's degree in theology, religious studies, social studies or public administration, with a working knowledge of principles of religious social teaching, and five years of management experience preferred. Salary commensurate with experience. Job description is available at www.oua-adh.org. Deadline: Jan. 15, 2008. E-mail cover letter, résumé, salary history and three references to: Search Committee, Office of Urban Affairs of the Archdiocese of Hartford, jsmyth@oua-adh.org.

PROVOST. Marquette University, a Catholic, Jesuit university of 11,500 students, located in Milwaukee, Wis., invites nominations and applications for the position of Provost.

The Provost is the chief academic officer of the university with overall responsibility for academic affairs. The Provost will provide an intellectual vision of Catholic and Jesuit higher education and strong academic leadership across the university, including 10 academic deans, the dean of libraries, the dean of undergraduate admissions, the dean of the graduate school and vice provost for research, and the vice provost for undergraduate programs and teaching. The Provost, who reports directly to the President, will work in close partnership with the Senior Vice President, who also reports directly to the President, to provide overall institutional planning and internal management for the university and to ensure the adequacy of financial support for the academic mission of the university.

The university seeks an individual who has an earned doctorate, proven track record of scholarship, a capacity to be appointed to full professor with tenure and excellent communication skills. The person must also have a genuine appreciation for and the ability to articulate clearly the Catholic and Jesuit educational mission. Substantial leadership experience at a college or university committed to excellence in teaching and research is another requisite.

The Provost will take the leadership role in fostering the development and enhancement of high quality undergraduate and graduate programs through ongoing review and assessment. The Provost will also seek to identify new sources of revenue to support programs which foster Marquette's mission. Compensation for this position is highly competitive. Marquette University offers excellent benefits, including: retirement plan; vacation; health, dental and life insurance; and tuition remission. Candidates may submit materials, including a curriculum vitae and a letter describing their interest in and qualifications for the position, online and in confidence at marquette.edu/provostsearch.

Questions may be directed to: Senior Staff, Provost Search Committee, Marquette University, Jeff.Snell@Marquette.edu. References may be requested at a later date and will be contacted only after candidates have been notified. While the position is considered open until filled, review of applications will begin in January 2008. The term of the Provost is expected to begin in time for the start of the 2008-9 academic year. AA/EOE. Visit our Web site at: www.marquette.edu.

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Wills

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Letters

Acceptable Losses

In "A Grim Task" (11/19), Maryann Cusimano Love fails to mention the thousands of Iraqi civilians who were killed by order of Saddam Hussein. And many of the deaths since the war began have been the result of Iraqi violence against Iraqis.

Unfortunately, any conflict brings civilian casualties. Some of us remember Hitler was killing those who disagreed with him long before the United States entered World War II. More died because of Allied bombing, but Hitler had to be stopped. Iraqis won't learn democracy overnight, but there is hope. We must not be impatient.

Kathleen Toups
Lafayette, La.

Funding the Future

Regarding "High Taxes, Empty Desks" (11/12): Terry Golway should continue to pay his taxes. However, he should also continue to complain that his children's share of educational funds are being denied them because they have chosen to attend a church-related school system.

The United States is one of very few countries that operates a state-run school system. Almost all Western countries permit and support all reputable schools catering to their youngest citizens. Of late, U.S. citizens are so frustrated with the poor quality of so many state-run schools that we are now outsourcing funds to charter schools, provided that they are not affiliated with any religious institution. That is a step in the right direction.

But most nations continue to recognize the religious dimension of life and gladly direct funds to students attending religious schools. Those funds greatly help these nonpublic schools to continue to provide highly praised educational programs, giving citizens a choice about the quality of education their children receive.

James McGrogan
Michigan City, Ind.

Much Ado About Everything

"In Mystic Silence," by William Johnston, S.J., (11/19) is an invitation and a challenge to others like myself to follow in the same way.

I too have spent over 50 years of my life as a Jesuit in Japan. Our paths, however, diverged when Father Johnston chose the way of Christian Zen, as he found it in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and I chose the way of William Shakespeare. This latter way, I soon came to realize in the light of my Japanese background, was also a Way of Unknowing, a Way of Nothing leading paradoxically to Everything.

I further came to the realization that this great dramatist, who seems to be among all poets the most impersonal, the most enigmatic and the most "myriad-minded," is paradoxically the most personal, the most himself and the most single-minded when he comes to Nothing. This is above all the Nothing of Cordelia in "King Lear," which is a creative Nothing as expressed in her aside, "Love, and be silent," and which culminates in her repeated response to her poor father, "And so I am, I am!"—in what is almost certainly a deliberate echo of the divine name.

Peter Milward, S.J.
Tokyo, Japan

That Hit the Spot

Thanks to Jim McDermott, S.J., for a delightful Of Many Things column about Ignatius, Francis Xavier and Peter Favre (12/3). To me, Of Many Things is an appetizer before the feast, nothing too heavy as the reader gets the intellectual juices flowing for the first course of your thought-provoking editorials. You have hit the mark with a story that is light and enjoyable, but also a profound teaching moment as the reader sees into the personalities of three of the leaders who shaped the character of our church. And you left me hungry for more.

Art Maurer
Penfield, N.Y.

Obstacles to Unity

"What Divides Orthodox and Catholics?" by Maximos Davies, (12/3) provoked the following thoughts.

First, the history of the treatment of the Eastern churches by the Holy See and individual bishops may have more to do with the differences between the Orthodox and Catholics than with all the theological and philosophical items presented by Hieromonk Davies.

Second, along with that reasonable fear, based on historical experience, is the fear of being swallowed up by the numerically and politically more powerful Latin-rite church—and of losing the cultural identities so tied in with the Eastern churches, both Catholic and Orthodox.

Third, it should be remembered that those in the Eastern churches have a clearer historical memory of Islamic aggression than those dwelling in the ivory towers of Rome and the West.

James Pawlak
West Allis, Wis.

Making a Killing

Thank you for your editorial "Thanking Our Soldiers" (11/12). As a soldier and a Catholic, I took a special interest in it and was grateful that the editorial separated the soldier from the enterprise in which he is engaged.

Your comments on soldier pay are grossly misinformed, however; and I am confident you would want to correct them. For one, only the rawest of recruits earns $1,300 per month. Within one year, a soldier ought to be earning $1,523 per month.

That soldier receives additional combat pay, a housing allowance, a family separation allowance and a subsistence allowance to cover incidentals. The taxable equivalent salary of such a 19-year-old employed in a war zone is over $40,000 per year. While there is not enough money in the world to compensate a soldier for the dangers faced and the hardships endured, $40,000 is still an

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awfully good salary for a young man just a year out of high school.

Additionally, his family gets full medical care and a dizzying array of services on base. Wives spend the difficult time with support groups and counseling. Their children are in low-cost or free day care. The PX, commissary, movie theater, clubs, bowling alleys and coffee shops on base are all serving the soldiers' family at cost or just slightly higher.

The military communities are families, who share and care for one another. And the money is good. I should know. Like almost all the soldiers I served with, I managed to save tons of cash during my year-and-a-half deployment.

Bill Maughan
Henryville, Pa.

Faithful to Junk

"Farming With Junk," by Kyle Kramer, (10/15) was a most enjoyable read. As the mother of a farmer who tills his fields with similar junk, I appreciated the images presented. The principle is the same, whether dealing with a piece of machinery or a life or a love: fidelity and infinite patience can prolong life beyond its limits.

Marcia Dumaresq
Dracut, Mass.

Technological Savvy

You erroneously state in Signs of the Times on Nov. 26 that the recent November meeting was the first time the bishops used an electronic voting system. The bishops first used electronic voting in November 2001 for the election of conference officers and again in 2004. They also used electronic voting in 2006, though not for the election of a president.

Mary Ann Walsh, R.S.M.
Director of Media Relations
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
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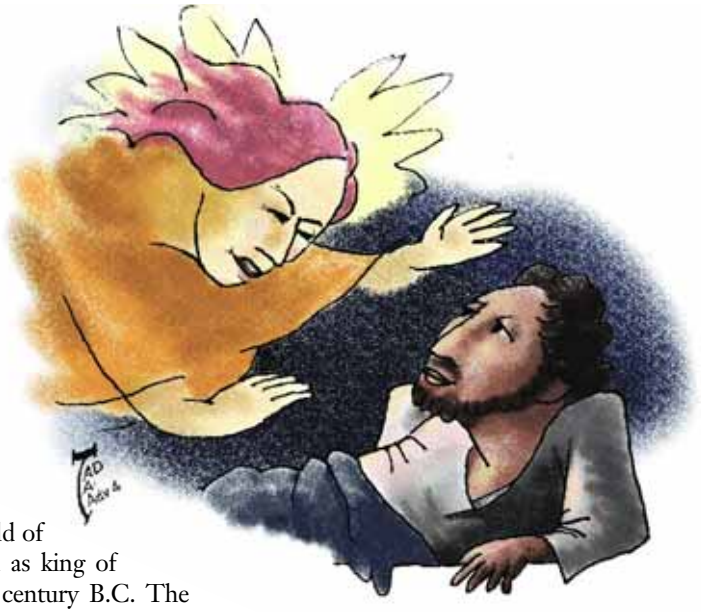
The Word

Emmanuel



ART BY TAD DUNNE

Fourth Sunday of Advent (A), Dec. 23, 2007

Readings: Is 7:10-14; Ps 24:1-6; Rom 1:1-7; Mt 1:18-24

"And they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us'" (Mt 1:23)

THE HEBREW NAME Emmanuel, which means "God is with us," combines the Hebrew expression for "with us" and one of the words for "God" (El). It refers to the presence of God among us—the great Advent hope.

Psalm 24, today's responsorial psalm, was part of a liturgy carried out at the Jerusalem temple ("the mountain of the Lord"). When ancient Israelites came to worship the Creator and Lord of all, they hoped to experience God's presence in a special way and to receive a blessing from the God of Jacob. They sought "Emmanuel."

The reading from Isaiah 7 is one of the most famous passages in the Hebrew Bible. It features the prophet's promise of "Emmanuel," a future descendant of the royal household of David. Ahaz reigned as king of Judah in the eighth century B.C. The prophet Isaiah was disappointed with Ahaz's policies and looked forward to a better king. The sign he gave Ahaz was this: "A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel." To Ahaz and his royal court, Emmanuel referred to the son (probably Hezekiah) who would be born to one of the king's wives. The assumption behind this prophecy was that through the future king, God would be present once more in a special way to his people Israel. The name given to him by the prophet expressed the hope that the new king would become what his name signified.

In the Letter to the Romans, Paul describes Jesus as "descended from David according to the flesh." That phrase contains in it the early Christian conviction that God's promise of Emmanuel has been marvelously fulfilled in Jesus, who through Joseph was the Son of David. What was promised to David and Ahaz has been brought to fruition in Jesus. That was a precept of early Christian faith.

The identification of Jesus as Emmanuel is made explicit in today's passage from near the beginning of Matthew's Gospel. There Joseph is told in a dream that the child to be born to Mary is what Isaiah really hoped for. Throughout Matthew's narrative of Jesus' public ministry, we learn how he manifested God's presence in his wise teachings and mighty deeds. In the passion narrative

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Jesus fulfills the Scriptures about the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53) and the Suffering Righteous One (Psalm 22). At the very end of Matthew's Gospel, the risen Jesus promises to be with us "always, until the end of the age." From beginning to end Jesus is (and continues to be) Emmanuel.

Our most familiar Advent hymn begins "O come, O come, Emmanuel." When we sing it, we stand beside the psalmist, Isaiah, Paul and Matthew, and we profess our faith in Jesus as Emmanuel in the flesh, as God's presence within our common humanity. We also look forward to the fullness of God's presence in his kingdom. The great Advent hope is expressed in the name "Emmanuel."

Praying With Scripture

- Where and how do you experience the presence of God?
- How do today's readings illustrate the biblical dynamic of promise and fulfillment?
- Does the understanding of Jesus as Emmanuel enrich your participation in the Eucharist?

A Motley Crew

The Nativity of the Lord—Vigil Mass, Dec. 25, 2007

Readings: Is 62:1-5; Ps 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25; Mt 1:1-25

"Of her was born Jesus, who is called the Christ" (Mt 1:16)

THE ADJECTIVE "MOTLEY" means variegated in color. By extension it can refer to any grouping of diverse and often incongruent elements. The expression "motley crew" describes a loosely organized group of very different persons joined together (sometimes unconsciously) to achieve a goal. The Scripture readings for the Vigil Mass at Christmas, especially Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, remind us that the Word became flesh in a motley crew of Jewish saints and sinners and has created a church that is all the more a motley crew.

The genealogy of Jesus in Mt 1:1-17 strikes terror in most lectors and homilists. The strange Hebrew names are hard to pronounce, and it is even harder to identify the figures behind them. Nevertheless, the genealogy provides an opportunity to reflect on the heritage of Jesus. Matthew's genealogy is divided into three segments of 14 members each: it moves from Abraham to David, from David to the Babylonian exile and from the exile to Jesus. Its orderliness suggests that Jesus the Messiah of Israel was born at the right time, in the fullness of time.

The other readings support that impression. In his speech in Acts 13, Paul places Jesus in the context of the Exodus, God's choice of David and the ministry of John the Baptist. Psalm 89 points to God's covenant with David as a source of blessing and joy for God's people. Isaiah 62 celebrates Israel's return from exile as proof of God's renewed love for his chosen people. For Christians, these events in Israel's history culminate in the birth of Jesus.

There are, however, some breaks in Matthew's orderly genealogy of Jesus. The most obvious surprise is the inclusion of several biblical women of dubious reputation: Tamar, who dressed as a prostitute to get children from Judah (Genesis 38); Rahab, the pagan prostitute of Jericho; Ruth, the Moabite; and Bathsheba, who committed adultery with David (2 Samuel 11–12). Their "irregularity" prepares for the irregular (virginal) birth of Jesus. Moreover, the Jewish males listed in the genealogy are an odd mix of saints and sinners. Most of the kings of Judah receive negative reviews in 2 Kings. And we know nothing about those persons mentioned after Zerubbabel down to Joseph.

In the Christian Bible, Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is the bridge between the two Testaments. It roots Jesus in the history of Israel as God's people while pointing to the surprising new event in salvation history that God has brought about through the birth of Jesus. It reminds us that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us in very concrete circumstances. It provides evidence that the God who placed Jesus in such a motley crew of people can continue to guide his church today as a motley collection of saints and sinners from all over the world. (For the Scripture readings for other Christmas Masses, see my essays in **America,** 12/19/05 and 12/18/06.)

Daniel J. Harrington

Praying With Scripture

- What does the orderliness of Matthew's genealogy suggest about Jesus' birth?
- What significance do you attribute to the Jewish heritage of Jesus?
- How does the presence of the "irregular" women prepare for the birth of Jesus?