



America

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Pius and the Nazis

Gerald P. Fogarty

Jennie D. Latta
on Bankruptcy Reform

George M. Anderson
on Congo's Lament

CHRISTIAN FAITH TAKES HISTORY seriously. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a real place, and at a specific time. A traditional way to proclaim the birth of Jesus is found in the Roman Martyrology. When I was a first-year Jesuit novice in 1957, this was read during dinner on Christmas Eve and then sung in Latin at Midnight Mass. That version had been assembled and approved in 1584. Calculating from the Old Testament, it put the birth of Jesus 5,199 years from the creation of the world. From the birth of Abraham, 2,957 years had passed and from the Exodus, 1,510 years.

A newer version, published by the U.S. Catholic bishops in 1994, spoke of “unknown ages from the time when God created the heavens and the earth,” 21 centuries from the time of Abraham and Sarah and 13 centuries after Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt.

In 2001 the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship updated the entire Martyrology to be more historically accurate.

The entry for the Nativity began, “From the creation of the world...countless ages have passed.” Abraham remained at “about 2,100 years,” and since the Exodus, 13 centuries.

Biblical scholars continue to establish more accurate dating of historical events of the Old Testament, and scientists refine the age and stages of the universe. A Martyrology entry for the Nativity based upon contemporary biblical scholarship and science (and allowing for further development) might picture the history of the universe into which Jesus Christ entered as follows:

The Twenty-fifth Day of December

From the creation of the world, when in the beginning God created the universe, 13.7 billion years,
 From the formation of the first galaxies, 10 billion years,
 From the formation of our galaxy, sun and solar system, five billion years,
 From the formation of planet Earth, 4.6 billion years,
 From the origin of life on Earth, the first living cells, 3.5 billion years,
 From the time when the continents of earth stabilized, 2.5 billion years,
 From the time of the first ice age, 2.3 billion years,

From the birth of sea life and fish in the ocean, 550 million years,
 From the first plants and vegetation on land, 400 million years,
 From the age of the dinosaurs, 230 million years,
 From the age of the first apes and monkeys, 35 million years,
 From the age of *Homo habilis*, 2.6 million years,
 From the time of *Homo erectus* and the use of tools, 1 million years,
 From the time of the first female from whom all human DNA can be traced, 160,000 years,
 From the time of *Homo sapiens* and the use of language, 80,000 years,
 From the time of the last ice age, 12,000 years,
 From the time of the first cities, 10,000 years,
 From the invention of phonetic writing, 3,500 years,
 From the time of the flourishing of civilization in Egypt, 3,000 years,
 From the time of

Of Many Things

Abraham and the Patriarchs, 1,925 years,
 From Moses and the coming of the Israelites out of Egypt, 1,280 years,
 From the anointing of King David, 1,011 years,
 From the time of the prophets Amos, Hosea and Isaiah, 750 years,
 In the 194th Olympiad,
 In the year 752 since the founding of the city of Rome,
 From the time of the poet Homer, 700 years,
 From the time of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, 450 years,
 In the 42nd year of the empire of Octavian Augustus, when the Roman world was at peace,
 Jesus Christ, eternal God and Son of the eternal Father
 Desirous to sanctify the world by his most merciful coming,
 Having been conceived of the Holy Spirit,
 And nine months having elapsed since his conception,
 Is born in Bethlehem of Judah,
 Having become human of the Virgin Mary.
 THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO THE FLESH.

Peter Schineller, S.J.

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Cover art Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, who became Pope Pius XII, is seen during a visit to Budapest, Hungary, as Vatican secretary of state, in this June 11, 1938, file photo. (CNS photo.)



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This week @
America Connects

Gerald P. Fogarty, S.J., considers the complicated legacy of Pius XII on our podcast. Plus, a remembrance of Sister Thea Bowman from 1990, and more Advent video reflections from the editors. All at americamagazine.org.

A Wave of Hate

While the incidence of hate crimes overall is down, a recent report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation notes a rise in crimes against Latinos, reflecting a nationwide anti-immigrant backlash. A particularly vicious hate crime occurred last month in Suffolk County, N.Y., an area where anti-immigrant tensions have increased over the past two decades. On Nov. 18 a group of seven teenagers calling themselves the Caucasian Crew attacked Marcelo Lucero and a friend. Lucero, employed at a dry cleaner's to help support his ailing mother in his native Ecuador, had been in the United States for 16 years. The crew members periodically went out "beaner jumping," their term for harrassing Latinos. The teenagers surrounded the two men near the train station in Patchogue, Long Island. The friend escaped, but when Lucero tried to defend himself with his belt, one attacker stabbed him. The 17-year-old killer, Jeffrey Conroy, was charged with a hate crime and second-degree murder.

Attacks have been frequent elsewhere in the country too. Last year, a Latino immigrant in Wright City, Mo., was attacked and robbed by three men who broke into his mobile home yelling "immigration enforcement!"

At a press conference in the wake of the Lucero murder, Janet Murguia, president of the National Council of La Raza, expressed alarm at the "wave of hate" that has been exacerbated by the inflammatory rhetoric of radio and cable show hosts and even of some elected officials. Anti-immigrant hatred has no place in a nation built on the work of immigrants.

Was Adam Smith Wrong?

Has the "invisible hand" failed? A central theory of classical economics is that self-interest is the engine of a healthy economy and the most efficient means of distributing goods throughout a society. According to the theory, consumers need certain goods. But how does one produce the right goods for consumers? Adam Smith theorized that there is a natural incentive for companies who wish to earn a profit to produce the goods that are most needed. Successful companies produce these goods at affordable prices; they flourish and hire new employees. Workers seek out companies that pay the best wages. Thus, according to the theory, goods are distributed "efficiently," workers are paid "fair market wages," and companies that meet society's economic needs are rewarded. Shareholders are rewarded for their steward-

ship of these companies. That is the theory.

In the recent financial crisis, however, an essential element was missing from this model: information. For companies to be well run, shareholders must know the financial health of the company in order to make sound decisions. But financial management failed to bother to understand the investments they were making or, if they did, to inform others. This is where consideration of the common good should have entered.

In a prescient essay in the periodical *Communio* in 1985, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote that business ethics rang like a "hollow bell" when the goal of efficiency crowded out morality. Had financial managers been concerned with morality as well, they would have been less likely to make foolish, short-sighted decisions. Cardinal Ratzinger wrote, referring to morality, "The decline of such discipline can actually cause the market to collapse." Would that the heads of the American Insurance Group, Fannie Mae and Citigroup had been reading *Communio* as well as *Forbes*.

Reason's Greetings

"Why believe in a God? Just be good for goodness' sake."

The statement sounds like a take-off on the Christmas favorite "Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town." In fact, it is appearing in advertisements on buses in our nation's capital. Across the ocean in London, posters on buses say: "There is probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." In Colorado, a coalition of groups called the Coalition of Reason uses billboards to stress the community aspect of atheism: "Don't Believe in God? You Are Not Alone." In Australia, on the other hand, proposed ads reading, "Celebrate Reason—Sleep in on Sunday Mornings," have been rejected by ad companies.

Secular humanists are aggressively campaigning during this holy season, when Christians look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus. A British Web site has been surprisingly successful in online fundraising efforts to support the secular humanist advertising campaign.

Reactions to this campaign of atheistic evangelizers are twofold. Most believers seemed very annoyed at the timing—the Christmas season. As one person put it, "Why can't atheists come up with their own holiday season and day of celebration?" Others look more positively upon the ads and contend that in the midst of busy city life, the ads may push theists and atheists alike to pause and think about the deeper questions of life. That would be valuable during any season of the year.

The Art of the Possible

NEXT MONTH WILL MARK the 36th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the flawed U.S. Supreme Court decision that overturned most laws restricting abortion in America. The official anniversary will be Jan. 22, two days after another historic milestone, the inauguration of Barack Obama as the nation's 44th president. These two events should provoke serious national reflection on how to address the tragedy of abortion in this country, which Pope John Paul II rightly characterized as an affront to the dignity of the human person, undermining the very fabric of society.

While access to abortion is protected by judicial fiat, there are several strategies the new president could employ that would reduce the number of abortions. He could appoint justices to the U.S. Supreme Court committed to the sanctity of human life and to a more reasonable and moral view of the right to privacy than the one expressed in *Roe*. He could keep in place the restraints on abortion imposed by executive order during the George W. Bush administration. He could veto the Freedom of Choice Act, in the event that it reaches his desk, and he could fight any effort to repeal the Hyde Amendment, the federal law that bars the use of federal funds to pay for abortions.

Mr. Obama should do all of these things. He is not likely, however, to do any of them. That is political reality. Though pro-life activists should not exempt the new president from moral suasion, nor abandon efforts to end access to abortion by all legal and moral means, they must realize that Mr. Obama is not at all likely to pursue policies that several committed pro-life presidents like Reagan, George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush were either unwilling or unable to adopt themselves.

Instead of bemoaning this fact, pro-life activists should take seriously Mr. Obama's promise to find ways of reducing abortions short of outlawing them. This approach may be both prudent and morally justified. As the U.S. Catholic bishops have noted, "sometimes morally flawed laws already exist. In this situation, the process of framing legislation to protect life is subject to prudential judgment and 'the art of the possible.'"

The prudent question that pro-life advocates should pose is, What could we ask Mr. Obama and a Democratic Congress to do that they might actually do? Given that the abortion rate, according to the pro-choice Guttmacher

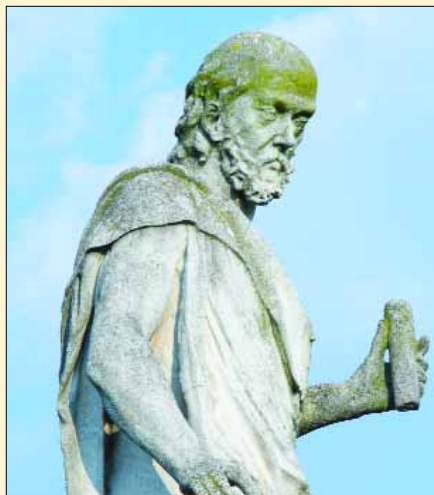
Institute, among women living below the federal poverty level is more than four times that of women living 300 percent or more above the poverty level, pro-life activists could work with Congress and the president to provide low-income women with health care, childcare, housing, services for disabled children and other basic supports young women especially need.

Pro-life activists could also insist on a review of federal and state welfare policies to ensure that they do not indirectly encourage abortions. This is especially important in light of the fact that there may be a correlation between the existence of state caps on children eligible for economic assistance and an increased incidence of abortion. Advocates could also work with the president and Congress to increase federal funding for adoption services and comprehensive, morally acceptable sexuality education and crisis pregnancy centers, as well as support for programs to curb domestic violence and sexual abuse. All of these efforts are required by a culture that values life. As John Paul II noted, "It is not enough to remove unjust laws.... For this reason there need to be set in place social and political initiatives capable of guaranteeing conditions of true freedom of choice in matters of parenthood."

MR. OBAMA, IN TURN, HAS AN ETHICAL OBLIGATION to work with pro-life activists and others to address the problem. Aside from his moral duty to protect the unborn, the new president also made a campaign promise. During his acceptance speech last summer at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Mr. Obama pledged to bring people together across traditional political divisions, adding that "we may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country." The new president should honor this commitment by engaging in a serious, sustained dialogue with pro-life advocates, recalling that his mandate for change does not necessarily reflect a national consensus on every issue, let alone the most divisive ones.

Over one million abortions were performed last year in the United States; over 45 million have been performed since 1973. These statistics assail the conscience of the country. We must act now to reduce seriously the number of abortions and unwanted pregnancies in the United States by seizing the current moment of national unity engendered by Mr. Obama's historic victory.

Vatican Praises Galileo as a Man of Faith



Statue of Galileo in Padua, Italy

Sixteen years after Pope John Paul II said the Catholic Church erred when it condemned the 17th-century astronomer Galileo Galilei, the Vatican secretary of state said the astronomer was “a man of faith” who recognized God as creator of

the cosmos. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the secretary of state, spoke briefly Nov. 26 at the opening of a Rome conference titled, “Science 400 Years After Galileo Galilei,” designed to bring scientists, ethicists and other experts together to discuss the role of ethics in scientific research. The cardinal said recent studies and the Vatican’s own review of the Inquisition trial of Galileo “have shed light on the shortcomings of churchmen tied to the mentality of their age,” but also gave people a more accurate understanding of Galileo’s beliefs. “Galileo, a man of science, also cultivated with love his faith and his deep religious convictions,” Cardinal Bertone said, repeating Pope Benedict XVI’s statement that “Galileo Galilei was a man of faith who saw nature as a book written by God.” In 1992, Pope John Paul said the church had erred in condemning Galileo for asserting that the Earth revolved around the sun.

Positive ID of Copernicus’s Remains in Poland

The bishop who supervised a successful search for the remains of Nicolaus Copernicus, a priest and the father of modern astronomy, said the discovery can represent the resolution of disputes between science and religion. “The conflict between interpretations of holy Scripture and empirical observations about the world resulted from a great misunderstanding which we’ve gradually moved away from,”



Copernicus memorial in Warsaw, Poland

Auxiliary Bishop Jacek Jezierski of Warmia told Catholic News Service Dec. 1. “Since Copernicus was a key figure in this process, we wanted to honor him by finding his bones and reintering him in a fitting way, something previous generations couldn’t do despite 200 years of searching.” Copernicus’s remains, discovered at the

town of Frombork’s 14th-century cathedral in 2005, were identified positively in November with forensic and DNA testing in Poland and Sweden.

Bioethics Document Coming Soon

The Vatican plans to issue a new document on bioethics that addresses human cloning, stem cell research and other issues, informed sources said. The Vatican instruction, prepared by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the

Faith, was scheduled to be published Dec. 12, the sources said. The document was designed to examine ethical issues in biological research and health care that have emerged in recent years. When members of the C.D.F. met in a plenary session last January, Cardinal William J. Levada, the congregation prefect, said much of their discussion focused on the field of

bioethics. At that time, the cardinal hinted that a document was in the works. He said it might examine new therapeutic options and some ethical problems that were not explicitly considered by two previous church documents: the doctrinal congregation’s instruction *Donum Vitae* (*The Gift of Life*) in 1987 and Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*) in 1995. A Vatican press conference was planned for the day of the document’s release.

Ethics Key to Solving World Financial Crisis

A leading Vatican diplomat warned that the current financial crisis could become a catastrophe unless solutions are found that respect ethics and involve all levels of society. “It is necessary to recover some basic aspects of finances, such as the primacy of labor over capital, of human relationships over purely financial transactions, and of ethics over the sole criterion of efficiency,” Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Vatican’s permanent observer to the United Nations, told Vatican Radio Nov. 28. “For some time we’ve found ourselves in the middle of a financial crisis that could become a catastrophe if its effects are allowed to impact other crises: in economics, food and energy,” he said. Archbishop Migliore made the remarks on the eve of the U.N.-sponsored International Conference on Financing for Development from Nov. 29 to Dec. 2 in Doha, Qatar. The archbishop led a Vatican delegation to the conference.

Papal Visit to Holy Land Likely in May 2009

The Vatican has confirmed tentative plans for Pope Benedict XVI to visit the Holy Land in 2009. The pope was invited to visit by President Shimon Peres of Israel in 2007. At that time, the pope made it clear he hoped to make the trip, but Vatican diplomats said the timing would depend in large part on efforts to calm the simmering Israeli-Palestinian

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.

Signs of the Times

conflict. In recent months, Israeli and Vatican officials began making more concrete plans for a papal visit. The contacts were first reported Nov. 27 by the Israeli newspaper Haaretz and were confirmed by the Israeli Embassy to the Holy See. Israeli sources said the most likely time for the visit would be May, with stops in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Mumbai Bishop Urges Unity, Forgiveness

A church leader in Mumbai, India, urged Catholics and people of all religions to forgive and unite after the terrorist attacks in that city. Auxiliary Bishop Bosco Penha of Mumbai told the Asian church news agency UCA News Nov. 27 that the church condemned “this dastardly act of terrorism.” All Catholics, he said, should “go on their knees to pray and get involved in building bridges” among people of all religions and “spread peace, harmony and brotherhood in the city.” “The unprecedented ferocity of the terror attack” shocked local church leaders, Bishop Penha admitted. He said he had talked to Mumbai’s Cardinal Oswald Gracias about the Catholic Church taking more “responsibility” to do “something solid in Mumbai.” Bishop Penha is currently in charge of the archdiocese while Cardinal Gracias recuperates from cancer surgery.

Maryknoll Elects New General Council



Edward M. Dougherty, a Maryknoll priest from Philadelphia, took office Nov. 25 as superior general of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. Father Dougherty, 59, and three other Maryknoll priests form a new general council that will lead the society for the next six years. They were elected during the society’s recent 12th general chapter.

General chapters are convened every six years to hold elections and to set goals and policy for the society. In a statement, Father Dougherty said: “Our council will focus on the goals set by the recent general chapter that include an emphasis on protecting the integrity of creation, and on strengthening our partnerships with other like-minded groups, while looking forward to the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Maryknoll’s founding in 2011.”

The other members of the four-man

council and their posts are: José A. Aramburu, 61, of Utuado, Puerto Rico, vicar general; Paul R. Masson, 64, of Oil City, Pa., assistant general; and Edward J. McGovern, 53, of New York City, assistant general. They will be responsible for leading about 450 priests and brothers who serve in 27 countries worldwide.

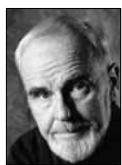
Hospitaller Brother Beatified in Cuba

José Olallo Valdes, a member of the Hospitaller Brothers of St. John of God who worked among Cuba’s poor and sick in the 19th century, was beatified at an outdoor Mass attended by thousands of joyous people and broadcast nationwide. Cardinal José Saraiva Martins, former prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Saints’ Causes, presided at the beatification of the Cuban brother during a three-hour Mass Nov. 29 in the Plaza of Our Lady of Charity in Camagüey. It was the first beatification ceremony held in Cuba. In his homily, Cardinal Saraiva Martins said the event was a milestone and told the people of the Cuban Catholic Church: “You live in a memorable time. Confronted by a prevailing materialistic culture that is imposing and abandons the side of the weak and helpless, we learn from Blessed Olallo the virtue of knowing how to trust in God, of knowing how to love our neighbor in universal form.”

Editors of ‘America’ Honored at Philadelphia Parish Anniversary



The past and present editors of **America** were honored at a gala celebration in Philadelphia’s Constitution Center on Nov. 8. Old Saint Joseph’s Parish was celebrating the 275th anniversary of its foundation by Joseph Greaton, S.J. The present pastor, Daniel Ruff, S.J., spoke of freedom and religious liberty in Catholic history before presenting the Greaton Award to Drew Christiansen, S.J., **America**’s current editor in chief, on the occasion of the magazine’s 100th anniversary. Left to right are: Thomas J. Reese, S.J., Drew Christiansen, S.J., Maurice Timothy Reidy, Jan Attridge and Dennis M. Linehan, S.J.



Abortion Absolutists

“The sad reality is that extremists on both sides are alienating citizens from one another.”

IF THERE IS ANY HOPE for change in national abortion politics, it will rest on more honest and open discussion. The sad reality is that extremists on both sides are alienating citizens (as well as people of faith) from one another. The common ground that unites the majority of Americans who want to limit abortions is eroded by people who insist on an absolute position.

The extremist poles on abortion are these: 1) nothing short of criminalizing the termination of any pregnancy from fertilization or conception is acceptable; 2) nothing short of total reproductive choice until birth is acceptable. These extremes have determined the debate in the public square; and as long as this continues, we will never reach consensus to protect unborn human life. They are also polar positions that have never been closely examined by their proponents.

Absolutists for “choice” should answer the following questions. Is there no constraint on “reproductive freedom”? Do you want a woman to be free to choose only male births? Why or why not? Do you support abortion in the second or third trimester for the sake of harvesting organs? Would you support a woman’s right to sell her aborted fetuses? Are you in favor of infanticide for newborns resulting from a botched abortion? And speaking of neonates, what do you think are the significant differences between a one-day-old baby and a 30-week fetus? Are you willing to face the moral chaos of absolutizing the “right to choose”?

Absolutists for “life” should answer questions too. Since you hold, as I do, that

a human being’s life begins at fertilization or conception, do you think that Senator John McCain, Senator Orrin Hatch and John Danforth are accomplices to homicide in their support of embryonic stem cell research? Do you know why they hold their position? Can you offer evidence that might change their minds? Do you wish to criminalize those who sell or buy contraceptive pills that are likely abortifacients? Do you think there might be people of good faith and conscience who think a human life does not begin until implantation? If there are, are you proposing that we impose our position on them?

The politicizing of extreme positions that have never been seriously questioned has prevented any serious discussion of the facts. Facts are the enemy of both poles. And facts are what we should look at, if we are to address the topic of abortion in the public square.

The evidence supporting fertilization as the beginning of a human life is largely genetic. If you ask yourself when you began as an individual being, conception is the strongest candidate. Prior to that moment, there were two germ cells or gametes, each with 23 chromosomes and each a dead end. At fertilization you have a new being with 46 chromosomes programmed or informed to develop into the entire organism that is you, sporting the same genome of that initial zygote in almost all your cells. If another sperm had united with the ovum, the result would not have been you, with your unique genetic endowments, but a brother or a sister.

There is other evidence, however, to suggest that an individual human being does not begin until the process of implantation in the uterus begins. This is largely a cellular argument. In the judgment of some scientists and scholars, the cells of an early-stage embryo seem not to function as

an integrated unitary individual. They are undifferentiated, uncommitted to function as parts of an organism. Moreover, twinning can take place (as well as recombination), which suggests to some that it is not an integrated individual. Finally, the phenomenon of early-stage loss of embryos (from 40 percent to 60 percent) leads many to believe that an individual has not yet come to be. (All of these points, by the way, are countered by proponents of fertilization who argue that differentiation of a kind starts at day one, that twinning is genetically programmed and that the loss of embryos is only an indication that individuation has not occurred.)

There is a third-stage argument that focuses on organ formation. Some hold that you cannot speak of an organism until you have the formation of organs. Thus, they point to the 6- to 10-week period after fertilization as significant in determining the start of a human organism with an incipient heartbeat, a central nervous system and neural firings in the brain. There are honorable people who hold this, although I fail to see the cogency of their position.

What I do see is that most people open to the facts recognize that a human life has begun by the end of the first trimester of a pregnancy. It is at this point that some common ground may be reached to protect unborn human life. There is political will at hand to ensure such protection; but as long as the extreme positions hold sway, no action will be taken. People know that a human life is being terminated after the first trimester. What compounds the tragedy of abortion is our helpless acceptance of the ugly reality.

Abortion reform will occur only if the extreme positions are unmasked as intransigent, unwilling to suffer tough questions or accept the basic facts of life. Those of us who hold that human life begins at conception will continue to argue our case. We will celebrate adult stem cell therapies as strongly as we resist embryonic stem cell research. And we may convince many. But if we are unwilling to make even the slightest move to protect some of the unborn because we cannot protect all humans conceived, the shameful history of abortion in the United States will go unchanged. *John F. Kavanaugh*



How should we think about bankruptcy?

Forgive Us Our Debts

– BY JENNIE D. LATTA –

THE GOSPEL READING for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Mt 20:1-16) turns our usual understanding of economic values on its head. It flies in the face of the sturdy work ethic instilled in most of us from childhood. Even the Apostle Paul said, “If any one will not work, let him not eat” (2 Thes 3:10). So how is it that Jesus came to tell a story in which those who worked only the last hour of the day were paid as much as those who worked all day long? Why is it that those of us born to privilege, or at least with the tal-

JENNIE D. LATTA, a United States bankruptcy judge for the Western District of Tennessee, has a master’s degree in Catholic thought and life from St. Meinrad School of Theology.

ents and means to work our way toward privilege, cannot seem to still that interior puritanical whisper: “I must be one of the elect, for see how I have been rewarded! I’m glad I’m not like that one over there. If she had only worked a little harder (as I did), she would be chosen, just like me.”

I have served as one of the bankruptcy judges for the Western District of Tennessee for almost 12 years. I sit in Memphis, often called the “bankruptcy capital of the world,” because it has the dubious distinction of having had the highest per capita bankruptcy filing rate of any federal judicial district for more than 30 years. The reasons for this are complex. They include the city’s demographics, the local legal culture and some peculiarities of Tennessee law (which permits wage garnishment to collect debts and foreclosure of deeds of trust on homes in less than 30 days).

The Chandler Act of 1938, better known as Chapter 13 or “Wage Earner” Bankruptcy, is named for Congressman Walter C. Chandler, of Tennessee’s Ninth Congressional District in Memphis. In a Chapter 13 plan, bankruptcy debtors repay some or all of their debts over a three- to five-year period. Memphis consistently has one of the highest percentages of Chapter 13 filings, as opposed to Chapter 7 or “straight” bankruptcy in the country.

The United States began a great experiment in 1978, when Congress enacted the most liberal personal bankruptcy law in the world, called the Bankruptcy Code (to distinguish it from the prior Bankruptcy Act). The Bankruptcy Code did away with any requirement that a person prove himself or herself to be insolvent in order to obtain relief from creditors and permitted refiling without consequence and discharge every seven years. Under this system, personal bankruptcy filings rose at an unprecedented rate, soaring to 1,588,895 in 2004 from 287,564 in 1980. During that same period, consumer debt also rose steadily and dramatically, fueling a large expansion in the U.S. economy.

The Reform

At the time of my appointment in 1997, there was already talk of bankruptcy reform. There was a general feeling that something had gotten out of hand—that too many people were gaming the system and that what was needed was a return to those old-fashioned values of honesty and hard work. After many years of discussion and steady lobbying by the credit industry, the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005 became law. Also known as the Bankruptcy Reform Act, it was intended to make it

more difficult to file a bankruptcy case by re-imposing an eligibility test for filing (the so-called means test), limiting the protection provided to multiple filers and lengthening the period between discharges. After a huge run up leading to the Oct. 17, 2005, effective date, the number of personal bankruptcy filings plummeted to 597,388 in 2006. (In the bankruptcy world we thought that happened because everyone who could possibly file had already filed in 2005.)

For most Americans, the filing of a bankruptcy petition continues to be a sign of inadequacy and a cause for shame. It is one of our last dirty little secrets, one we dare not share with our neighbors, friends or co-workers.

Some of the more interesting provisions of BAPCPA, from a judge’s point of view, are the provisions limiting the duration or availability of the automatic stay (one of the most fundamental protections of those in bankruptcy) in second and subsequent filings. The automatic stay stops all collection efforts, including telephone calls, upon filing. One provision limits the automatic stay to 30 days in a second case; another prevents the stay from coming into effect in a third or subsequent case filed within a 12-month period. The Bankruptcy Code provides, however, that the stay may be extended or imposed if the debtor (or trustee) can prove that the repeat filing was “in good faith.” The code makes this difficult by providing that the subsequent filing is *presumed* not to be in good faith unless the debtor can show a substantial change in his or her financial or personal circumstances.

What these provisions meant for me as a judge, at least initially, was more hearings early in my consumer cases. I tried to respect the letter of the new law and required debtors to come to court to provide testimony to prove their change in circumstances. I heard stories about the reasons people find themselves filing two and sometimes three bankruptcy cases in a single year. Because the majority of cases in our district are Chapter 13 cases, often these were stories about why their first or second plan did not work out: they were laid off, they were injured or sick, they became responsible for the care of a sick or aging relative, or they had to pay funeral expenses. Often I thought that it might be a good idea for the members of Congress to hear

these stories. I no longer hold these hearings routinely. Instead of asking bankruptcy debtors to miss another day of work (often without pay), I allow their lawyers to appear on their behalf with a sworn statement of facts in support of their applications. Unless a creditor objects, which hardly ever happens, the extension or imposition of the stay is routine.

Expected Rate Increase

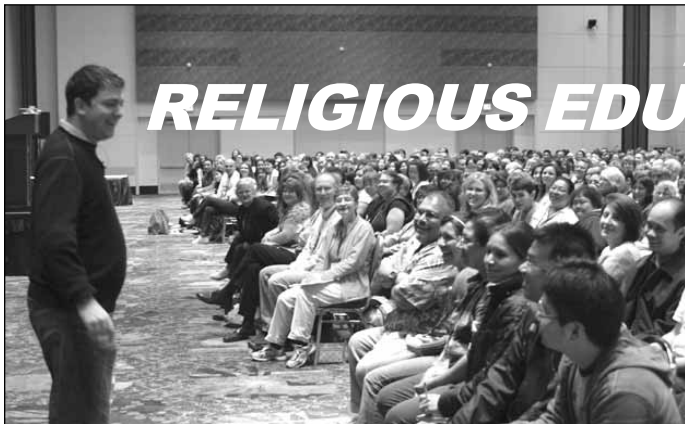
In all my years as a bankruptcy judge, both before and after the passage of BAPCPA, I have never heard anyone say, "Judge, I am so happy to be here!" or "Can't wait to see you again!" For most Americans, the filing of a bankruptcy petition continues to be a sign of inadequacy and a cause for shame. It is one of our last dirty little secrets, one we dare not share with our neighbors, friends or co-workers, and certainly not with our children. Yet it is projected that more than one million bankruptcy petitions will be filed in 2008. The initial and substantial drop in bankruptcy filings following the effective date of BAPCPA is over, and we are quickly climbing back to the filing levels that preceded it.

Approximately 30 percent of bankruptcy petitions are filed by married couples, so that one million bankruptcy petitions filed could actually represent as many as 1.3 million individual persons filing. In addition, Elizabeth Warren, a Harvard Law School professor, has shown that

households with children are much more likely to file for bankruptcy protection than those that have none, and that unmarried mothers with children are substantially more likely to file than women with no children or women with another adult partner in the household. The effect on these children and the shame felt by their parents can only be imagined. With each day bringing new headlines about the credit crisis, the real story is about everyday people, who once again find themselves turning to the federal bankruptcy courts for assistance.

Judges are by definition not policy makers. The Constitution and laws of the United States go to great lengths to protect the independence and integrity of federal judicial officers. Judges are intended to be neutral, applying laws written by someone else. Lawmakers and the general public justifiably become frustrated when judges are seen to be activists, meddling in affairs properly reserved to legislators. But we judges are people, too. We live in your neighborhoods, attend your churches, synagogues and mosques, and send our children to school with your children. Bankruptcy judges cannot help observing the impact of the bankruptcy laws upon the people around us.

And we wonder, is it possible that in our puritanical zeal, we have forgotten the Lord's little parable about workers in a vineyard? Have we convinced ourselves that we somehow deserve all that we have been given? **A**



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A Pope in Wartime

Why did Pius XII act as he did?

BY GERALD P. FOGARTY

OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS, the question of Pope Pius XII's conduct during World War II has again made the news. At the recent Synod on the Word of God in Rome, Chief Rabbi Cohen of Haifa said that many Jews still believe certain Catholic leaders did not do enough to prevent the Holocaust. On Oct. 9, the 50th anniversary of Pius XII's death, Benedict XVI endorsed the beatification of the late pontiff. Meanwhile, Abraham Foxman, the U.S. director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, has called for opening the Vatican archives for the war years to ascertain whether, as Benedict stated in October, Pius actually did work secretly to save many Jews.

In fact, there already exists historical evidence to make certain judgments about Pius XII. Researchers can glean much from the archives for Pope Pius XI that were opened in 2003 and 2006, especially in regard to Eugenio Pacelli, the future pope, as secretary of state. Twelve volumes of wartime documents published between 1967 and 1981, together with other national archives and newspapers, provide an additional basis for assessing Pacelli's behavior during wartime.

Largely because of his 1937 encyclical condemning the racial policies of the Nazi state (*Mit Brennender Sorge*), Pius XI has often been praised for his boldness on the eve of war. Pius XII, on the other hand, has been condemned for his relative "silence" in the face of Nazi aggression. Pacelli, critics contend, was so fearful of Communism that he sided with Hitler. Yet a close study of Pacelli's activities as secretary of state and later as pontiff yields a different picture.

A Diplomat's Dilemma

Eugenio Pacelli was appointed Vatican secretary of state in 1929. He was the first to hold the position after the signing of the Lateran treaties, which established the Vatican City State in order to guarantee the spiritual sovereignty of the pope. The treaties effectively ended the state of siege that had existed between the Holy See and the Kingdom of Italy since 1870. Pacelli had the task of shaping a new direction for Vatican diplomacy, yet he sometimes looked to past solutions to solve the problems he faced. He, for example,

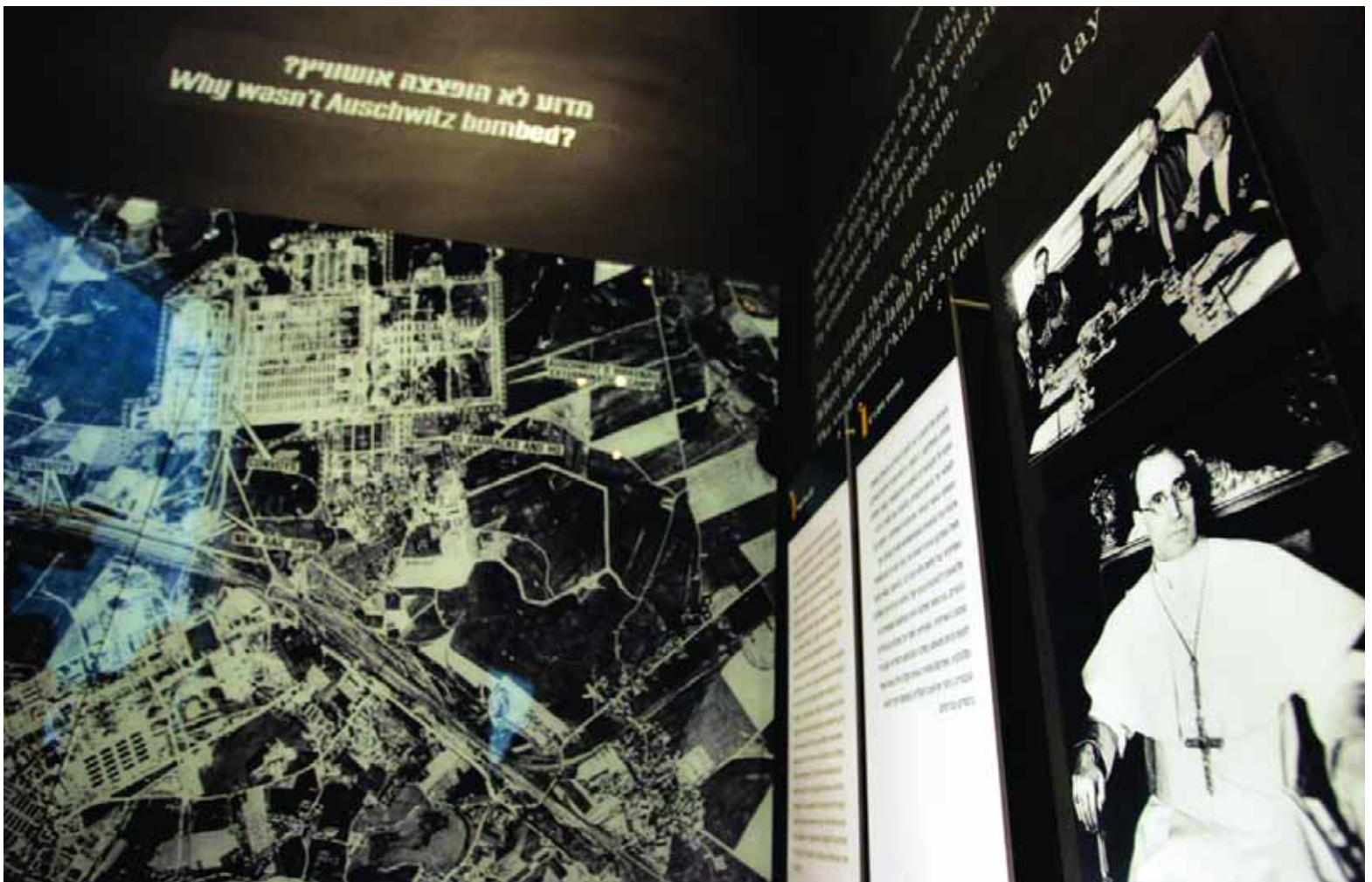
trusted concordats, such as the one he negotiated with Nazi Germany in 1933, to guarantee the legal rights of the church. The Nazis violated the agreement as early as the fall of 1933, and consistent violations led Pius XI to issue *Mit Brennender Sorge*. A few episodes surrounding the drafting and promulgation of this encyclical illustrate Pacelli's anti-Nazi sentiment.

In November 1936 Pacelli returned from a monthlong tour of the United States that included a visit with President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In Rome, he found, the conflict between the German church and the Nazi government had worsened. Early in January 1937, Pacelli summoned five leaders of the German hierarchy to a meeting in Rome. The six prelates developed a statement listing grievances against the Nazis and presented it to Pope Pius XI, who then signed it. Because of government restrictions, the nuncio in Berlin, Archbishop Cesare Orsenigo, had the encyclical distributed by courier and read from the pulpits of German Catholic parishes on Palm Sunday 1937. The German police confiscated as many copies as they could and called it "high treason." In the end, the encyclical had little positive effect, and if anything only exacerbated the crisis. The American ambassador reported that it "had helped the Catholic Church in Germany very little but on the contrary has provoked the Nazi state...to continue its oblique assault upon Catholic institutions."

The encyclical also occasioned the renewal of show trials against Catholic school teachers for supposed violations of morality. The Concordat of 1933 guaranteed the church's right to educate, but by bringing these charges against Catholic educators, the Nazis sought to prove that the church itself was in violation of the terms of the agreement.

Cardinal George Mundelein of Chicago made the Nazi attacks on the German church the topic of his address to his clergy in May 1937. He wondered how "a nation of 60,000,000 people, intelligent people...will submit in fear and servitude to an alien, an Austrian paperhanger, and a poor one at that I am told." The cardinal's office released the full text to the press, which broadcast it around the world. Upon learning of the speech, Pacelli asked the apostolic delegate to the United States for a copy of the "courageous declaration." The German ambassador to the Holy See demanded that Mundelein be reprimanded for his attack on the German head of state. Instead, Pacelli, togeth-

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An image depicting Pope Pius XII is displayed at Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem April 15, 2007.

er with the cardinals who comprised the Vatican's advisory group on foreign relations, stood by Mundelein's right to freedom of speech in his diocese and informed the German embassy that the problem arose from the Nazi persecution of the church. The Mundelein episode, however, provided the German government with another excuse for further attacks on the church.

Pacelli and the Anschluss

Pacelli's handling of the case of Cardinal Theodor Innitzer of Vienna is a further illustration of his anti-Nazi feelings. In March 1938 Innitzer embraced the Nazis' entry into Austria and led the hierarchy in urging Austrian Catholics to vote for the Anschluss. The nuncio to Vienna, Archbishop Gaetano Cicognani, the brother of the apostolic delegate to the American hierarchy, informed the American embassy that the Vatican did not support Innitzer's position. According to the nuncio, Innitzer had undermined the German bishops in their opposition to Nazism. In the name of the pope, Pacelli summoned Innitzer to Rome for a meeting. Arriving in the evening of April 5, Innitzer had a long meeting with Pacelli that journalists described as a "stormy session." The next day, the Austrian met with the pope, who treated him more gently

as a wayward son. Innitzer then issued a new statement basically retracting his earlier one and upholding the rights of the church. His penance did not last long: when he returned to Vienna he flew the swastika over his cathedral. By the following fall, however, Innitzer had broken with the Nazis and became an object of their attacks.

In the meantime, Pacelli sent a memorandum to Joseph P. Kennedy, then ambassador to the United Kingdom, whom the cardinal had met during his American visit, to say that Innitzer had originally spoken without the Vatican's knowledge or approval and had now issued a new statement, which was enclosed. Pacelli asked Kennedy to pass the information on to Roosevelt, as Charles Gallagher, S.J., wrote in *America* (9/1/2003). Kennedy also had the document sent to the State Department, which published it in *Foreign Relations of the United States* in 1955.

Aside from archival documents, there are other indications of Pacelli's aversion to the Nazi agenda. In May 1937, when the Mundelein affair had just begun, U.S. Ambassador William Phillips met Pacelli at a dinner arranged by the Irish ambassador to the Holy See. Phillips recorded in his diary how enthusiastic the cardinal was about his trip to the United States and his visit with Roosevelt, but "he talked mostly about his difficulties with

Germany. He mentioned that these were growing worse every day and he foresaw the time before long when the entire German people would become ‘pagans.’” Phillips characterized Pacelli as having “great personal charm and is a man of force and character with high spiritual qualities, an ideal man for Pope if he can be elected.” When Pacelli was elected, Phillips opined that his choice of name “is an intimation to the world that he intends to pursue the strong policy of Pius XI.” Phillips’s wife, Caroline, wrote that Pacelli’s election was “to the joy of everyone except perhaps Hitler & the Duce.” Phillips added a further note that he hoped Roosevelt would appoint a representative to the coronation “to show the respect and admiration which all Americans must feel for the new Pope.” In an unprecedented action, Roosevelt appointed Kennedy as the first American representative at a papal coronation. Subsequently, on Dec. 24, 1940, he appointed Myron C. Taylor as his personal representative to the pope, a substitute for formal diplomatic relations.

Reasons for Silence

Pacelli’s years as pope have been the subject of intense scrutiny. Was he silent because of insensitivity to the plight of Jews and other victims of Nazi aggression, such as Polish Catholics? A review of the available historical data points to a different conclusion.

In June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and Roosevelt immediately announced the extension of Lend Lease to this new victim of aggression. If Catholics supported this policy, did it mean they were cooperating with Communism, which had been condemned in 1937 in *Divini Redemptoris*? In a radio address from Washington funded by the State Department, Bishop Joseph Hurley of St. Augustine, a former Vatican official, drew the distinction between cooperation with Communism and aid to the “Russian” people. This created some public controversy among the American bishops, but the Vatican ultimately adopted Hurley’s position as its own.

On Dec. 17, 1942, eleven allied nations, including the Soviet Union, condemned the Nazi extermination of Jews. Critics have noted that Pius XII refused to sign the declaration, but they do not mention the reason for his refusal. The cardinal secretary of state, Luigi Maglione, explained that if the Holy See was to maintain its policy of “impartiality,” it would also have to condemn by name the Soviet Union, which had also committed atrocities. In his Christmas allocution a week later, however, the pope called for a postwar reconstruction of society on a Christian basis. To prevent future war, he urged humanity to make a vow to all the victims of the war, including “the hundreds of thousands of persons who, without any fault on their part, sometimes only because of their nationality or race, have been con-

signed to death or to a slow decline.” Many critics have claimed that the pope was so vague that it was not clear that he meant the Jews. Even strong papal supporters like Vincent McCormick, S.J., an American in Rome and former rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University, thought the allocution “much too heavy...& obscurely expressed.” McCormick suggested that the pope should abandon his German tutors and “have an Italian or Frenchman prepare his text.” Harold Tittmann, Myron Taylor’s assistant who resided in the Vatican, also reported that the statement contained vague generalities, but added that the allusion to the Jews was clear enough that the German diplomats boycotted the pope’s midnight Mass.

Pius did have an abstract manner of speaking. In this, he may have been guilty of pope-speak or Vaticanese, the use of which was not unique to him. For example, on Oct. 25, 1962, in the midst of the Cuban missile crisis, John XXIII gave a radio address in which he called on the world’s leaders to negotiate rather than resort to war, but he never mentioned Cuba or Kennedy or Khrushchev. Everyone at the time understood the context.

Other documents provide a broader context for understanding the actions of Pius XII. On Feb. 18, 1942, William Donovan, then director of the office of Coordinator of Information, forerunner of the Office of Strategic Services, informed Roosevelt that he had set up a State Department liaison for the Vatican and that Amleto Cicognani, the apostolic delegate, had paid him a long visit and pledged to turn over all information gained through diplomatic channels. Unfortunately, there is no further documentation on this issue, but it would be unlikely that information was transmitted in writing. Another provocative document is Harold Tittmann’s report in June 1945 that Josef Mueller, a leader of German resistance, told him that throughout the war Pius XII had followed the advice of the resistance not to attack Hitler personally because the German propaganda machine would construe it as an attack on the German people.

With this survey, I have attempted *not* to argue that Pius was not silent in regard to the plight of the Jews and other victims, such as the Poles, but rather to deny that this silence was due to indifference. When he was secretary of state, Pius learned that public protests had little effect on Hitler. As we have seen, the charge that he ever sided with Hitler out of fear of Communism is groundless. Many historians, including this writer, have asked that the Vatican open the Pius XII archives, but I suspect that the archival material will only add more shades of gray to a man who was trying to govern the church during an unprecedented period of inhumanity. **A**



Gerald P. Fogarty, S.J., talks about Pius XII, at americamagazine.org/podcast.

Congo's Lament

A country rich in resources remains mired in poverty.

BY GEORGE M. ANDERSON

DESPITE ITS IMMENSE NATURAL RESOURCES, the Democratic Republic of Congo has yet to benefit from them; most of its population lives in poverty. Ferdinand Muhigirwa, S.J., is familiar with Congo's potential as well as with the obstacles delaying the country's economic development. He is the director of Cepas (Centre D'Études pour l'Action Social), a research and social action center in Kinshasa, the country's capital. During a visit to Washington, D.C., he discussed several of the important issues facing his country.

Congo's natural resources include vast forest areas and deposits of gas and oil; but when we met, Father Muhigirwa spoke mainly of minerals. "Congo is especially rich in copper, gold, cobalt and coltan," he said. (Coltan is a combination of two minerals used widely in the electronics industry for products like the microchips in cellphones.) "Congo is poor, because multinational companies from abroad have exploited our resources without giving us a fair share of what they take out," he explained. The companies, based in countries like the United States, Canada, Belgium, South Africa and China, come in and conduct studies of the areas where they are interested in mining. "Then they acquire contracts from the government for the exploitation of minerals for periods as long as 20 or 30 years," he said, adding that these contracts have benefited neither the economy nor the Congolese people.

Father Muhigirwa hopes that the government of President Joseph Kabila, the first democratically elected president in over 40 years, will conduct what he calls "a

more careful review of the mining contracts, because the mines belong to the Congolese people, who should be benefiting from them." According to the priest, the mining sector is a key to the generation of real income for the nation,

and the government has set up a commission to see how this can best be done. In June 2007, the government began a formal review of 60 mining contracts signed between 1996 and 2003, to evaluate their legality and fairness and to decide whether to keep, renegotiate or cancel them. "What's needed," Father Muhigirwa emphasized, "are transparency and accountability in order to get rid of the exploitation and corruption that presently prevail."



Efforts by the Church

When asked about the role of the Catholic Church in efforts to help the country benefit from its resources, Father Muhigirwa replied that the bishops have played a strong role. In their pastoral letter of July 2007, they wrote:

Instead of contributing to the development of our country and benefiting our people, the minerals, oil and forest have become the causes of our misfortune. How is it that our fellow citizens find themselves, without compensation, dispossessed of their land by the fact that surfaces have been allocated or sold to one or the other mining company? Is it acceptable that Congolese workers are treated...without regard for their rights and human dignity?

The bishops also have established an episcopal commission to monitor the contract review process in order to ensure

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transparency. And, said Father Muhigirwa, “the bishops are now asking the Congolese government to set conditions for renegotiation in such a way as to respect their environmental obligations, too.”

Education and Agriculture

Father Muhigirwa said that although every child has the right to free primary education, it is not yet free in practice, because parents must contribute to the cost of the teachers’ salaries, which are too meager to cover their basic needs for food, shelter, transportation and health care. “Two years ago, the government agreed to increase the teachers’ salaries,” Father Muhigirwa said, “but the agreement has not yet been implemented.” The situation is more worrisome in areas where valuable minerals are found. Youngsters, parents and teachers search for them. They dig for the minerals in what is known as artisanal mining, hoping to sell what they find to local dealers, who then sell the minerals to the mining companies. “Young people often simply stop going to school as a result,” said the priest.

Another resource Congo could develop is agriculture. The soil is very fertile, and people can raise their own produce for food and for sale. They encounter problems, however, with transportation and infrastructure. There are too few roads on which to move the produce from the countryside to the towns; an adequate transportation system has not

yet been developed. “As a result,” Father Muhigirwa told me, “tons of rice, maize and other crops are left to rot in the fields.”

A related problem concerns European countries that export their subsidized surplus food to Congo, where it is sold at lower prices than the local farmers charge. “Our markets are flooded with imported chicken from Belgium and fish from Portugal, and so most people cannot afford to buy our own local foods because of this unfair trade situation,” said Father Muhigirwa. In an effort to correct the situation, the government has begun negotiations with European countries, planting a hope that African products can be sold there too. “But change that brings economic justice will take a long time to bring about,” he said.

A Christian, Democratic Society

Among the hopeful signs for Congo is the democratic process, including the election of President Kabila, 500 members of parliament and 120 senators. An active women’s movement, which has received support from a number of nongovernmental organizations, has made significant progress in Congo. “However,” Father Muhigirwa said, “female representation in government is still very low. For example, there are only 42 women in Parliament out of 500 members.” The new constitution calls for parity in the political field, but it has not happened yet. Of 33 presiden-

PHOTO: REUTERS: FINBARR O’REILLY

tial candidates, there were six women, the priest said, “and none of them won even 1 percent in the polls.” Cepas, his own organization, has started working with women’s non-governmental organizations to help women organize themselves more effectively.

The bishops have committed themselves to an emphasis on civic education in all the parishes. “Our large population of young people is another good sign,” Father Muhigirwa said. “Over half of all Congolese are under 25.” He also noted what he called “positive news” about vocations to religious life; in Kinshasa alone, there are numerous women’s congregations, “so the church is growing in that sense,” he said. The church does not work in a vacuum. “The relationship with Protestant churches is also good,” said the priest, adding that they too are involved in civic education. Catholics and Protestants together account for almost 70 percent of the population in Congo.

Hopes Dashed on the Rocks of Violence

Violent insurgents in eastern Congo have gained ground in recent weeks, however, bringing slaughter and chaos that have sent thousands more Congolese fleeing from their homes. Conflict may prove to be the people’s worst enemy, for it has all but dashed their hopes for a stable democratic government, for economic development and for the education of their children. Now the situation is dire.

Civil strife kept the country from developing as it might have during the last decade. And the war that began in 1998, linked with the illegal exploitation of natural resources, involved several other African countries. Father Muhigirwa said that the human cost is “the bloodiest since the Second World War, with over five million lives lost, according to the International Rescue Committee, and 1.5 million internally displaced persons and, between 2006 and 2007 alone, an estimated 40,000 cases of rape.” And that was in summer. A coordinated diplomatic effort led to a cease-fire agreement signed by the insurgents and the Congolese army, but it proved fragile and fell apart. The United Nations stationed its largest peacekeeping force in Congo, but it has not been able to keep the peace.

In August, Laurent Nkunda, a rebel general, took on the government and has made much headway since then. By fall his troops had nearly captured the city of Goma in eastern Congo, when Nkunda himself declared a cease-fire. On Nov. 7, U.N. and African leaders met in emergency session in Nigeria and called for an end to the conflict. But as U.N. Secretary General Ban-ki-Moon said then, there have been many meetings and agreements, “It’s a matter of political will.” Political will is lacking on the part of those who could bring it to bear. The rebel groups must be disbanded. Meanwhile, the people of Congo must wait for a chance to improve their lives. **A**



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Joy Is on the Way

Third in a series for Advent and Christmas

BY JAMES J. DIGIACOMO

THE FINAL WEEKS of Advent are about joy, power and majesty—all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding.

On the third Sunday our church puts aside the priest's purple vestments with their penitential flavor; instead priests don rose-colored chasubles to remind us of the joy that will soon be ours. It is called *Gaudete* Sunday, from a Latin word meaning "Rejoice!" We are supposed to feel good because Christmas is less than two weeks away.

But can we rejoice when so many things are going wrong? Our economy is in such frightening trouble that countries around the world feel its impact. Unemployment is high and threatens to go higher. Millions go without health insurance. Many families find themselves one paycheck away from welfare. The looming clouds of terrorism never go away, even though we are so angry at one another that we barely have the time or energy to notice. Our country's leaders face daunting tasks of reconciliation and protection. And some of us have personal problems that wear us down and will not go away either. When we look squarely at all these troubles, how are we supposed to rejoice?

Well, "*Gaudete*" does not simply mean "cheer up." When Paul tells us to "rejoice always, in all circumstances give thanks," he is not just telling us to lighten up. This is not about mere cheerfulness, looking on the bright side of things. Paul is not speaking about the joy of the light-hearted and carefree, but about a deep-down joy at the core of our being. There have been times when, no matter how many things were going wrong, we have been basically at peace with ourselves and with our lives. We have not lost sight of

what we know by faith: that God is a loving parent who cares and watches over us. We are going to be reminded of this at Christmas, when we recall that God sent



his only Son, of whom Isaiah foretold, "The Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim a day of vindication by our God" (Is 61:1).

From then on, whatever life throws at us, Jesus has been there, for the highs and the lows. Have you experienced the joy of success and a feeling of accomplishment? Jesus knows the feeling. Do you ever feel lonely or depressed or misunderstood? Jesus says, "Hey, I know what it's like." Have you known confusion or disappointment or failure? So has he. The Word was made flesh and pitched his tent among us. From now on, we are never alone.

In the readings for the last days of Advent, the church speaks not only of consolation but also of power and majesty. The Lord assures King David that his kingdom will endure forever. The angel tells Mary that her son will inherit David's throne and that his kingdom will have no end. What is the power that these people

are talking about?

David ruled over a third-rate power in the Middle East. The descendant who would inherit David's throne was raised by a carpenter and a peasant woman; he spent a few years as a traveling preacher and was executed as a criminal. When John the Baptist announced his coming, Tiberius was emperor, Pilate was procurator, Herod was tetrarch and Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. These were the dangerous, important men who held power. And who were the opposition? Two obscure preachers from up north. Could the odds have been any worse?

Yet look what happened. Talk about upsets! The Caesars and procurators and tetrarchs and high priests are gone, and they left no mark. Down through the centuries, great nations have risen and fallen. Who has survived? Whose voice endures?

The impact of Jesus on hearts and minds has never waned. He continues to influence every corner of the world. He inspires fidelity, conviction, courage, generosity, forgiveness and mercy. Men and women have dedicated their lives to spreading his message and living by his ideals. His divine majesty is expressed in impressive and enduring cathedrals. He is celebrated in art as well; the most beautiful Christmas cards you receive reproduce great paintings that portray the mother and child of Bethlehem. And the soaring notes of Handel's "*Messiah*" add to the symphony of celebration. This is power. This is majesty.

We cannot make light of the dangers and disasters that afflict us today, but we must not let them defeat us, either; we must not give in to despair. Beneath all the glitter and warmth of this festive season, a profound mystery is at work. Yet it can be perceived only with the eyes of faith. We look in the crib and see a God who loves us, not from a distance, but in our very midst, as one of us. **A**

JAMES J. DIGIACOMO, S.J., is the author of many books on youth ministry and religious education.

ART BY JULIE LONNEMAN

Do-You-Good Anthologies

Some poetry for the soul

BY JAMES S. TORRENS



THE READER OF POETRY is always on the lookout for good anthologies. Our tastes, often enough, have been formed by such classics as Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* or Louis Untermeyer's *Modern American Poetry* (1921) or Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960). Anthologies, to my mind, are either catch alls (grab bags of "my favorite things"), with artfulness the sole principle of choice (consider Garrison Keillor's *Good Poems*, Penguin, 2003); or they fall into one of the subgatherings or niches that might be titled *Eros*, *God*, *Nature*, *Society*.

A recent anthology from Liguori Publications, *Simple Graces: Poems for Meditation and Prayer*, 2003, lands squarely in the category *God*. These are not devotional or homiletic poems, but

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they all have their antennae up in some way toward the divine. The anthologists, Matthew Kessler and Gretchen Schwenker (a Redemptorist and an editor at Liguori), frankly state this criterion. Some of their favorite poets—Emily Dickinson, Emily Brontë, Rainer Maria Rilke—have their unique sense of the divine. Others, like Robert Hayden, Naomi Shihab Nye and Denise Levertov, approach God slantwise, through human phenomena. Wendell Berry, Mary Oliver and Patrick Kavanagh speak more directly and familiarly.

Simple Graces does not draw from the Modernist era—Eliot to Anne Sexton—but directs our interest back to the 19th century, with its attachment to rhyme and meter. Alice Meynell reappears here, effectively; so does Herman Melville in "Shiloh: a Requiem," from *Battle Pieces*. We hear from Gerard Manley Hopkins, of course, and from Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson, of the 1890s Rhymers Club. And finally, there is part of a devotional gem by Christina Rossetti:

*Lord, we are rivers running to
Thy sea,
Our waves and ripples all derived
from Thee;
A nothing we should have, a nothing be,
Except for Thee.*

A number of books now on the poetry shelves bespeak a new, hybrid category—*Anima*, or Soul. Poetry retreats, which have gained currency, make good use of these. One example is *Poems to Live by in Uncertain Times* (Beacon Press, 2001), by Joan Murray. Her poem "Survivors—Found," written after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, drew an outpouring of appreciation after she read it on National Public Radio. This showed people's need for words that cut through prolix reportage. A sample title from this new bittersweet collection is "Try to Praise the Mutilated Word," by Adam Zagajewski of Poland. An opening line from Theodore Roethke catches the

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MARIO LOPES


whole gist of the anthology: “In a dark time the eye begins to see.”

Right behind Murray’s anthology (and Garrison Keillor’s *Good Poems for Hard Times*, Penguin, 2006) loom two wonderful collections in the *Anima* genre. One is *A Book of Luminous Things* (Harcourt, 1996), an international anthology by the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz. It is strong on classic Chinese poems and introduces us to his incisive countrywoman Wislawa Szymborska. Robert Bly edited the other book, *The Soul Is Here for Its Own Joy: Sacred Poems From Many Cultures* (Ecco, 1995). I have a long list of favorites from this collection, which leans heavily to the Sufi poets Rumi and Hafiz and their Indian contemporary Kabir. I return often to Rumi’s surprising poem, “Jesus on the Lean Donkey.”

In 2001, Roger Housden started a series of “Ten Poems” books (Harmony Books), in which he walks the reader through each poem, dipping into his own relevant experience. The first of the series was *Ten Poems to Change Your Life* (no lack of ambition there!), and the fifth and last (2004) is *Ten Poems to Last a Lifetime*. Billy Collins, Rilke and Mary Oliver are recurrent favorites. He concludes the final book with Mary Oliver’s “When Death Comes,” which includes her memorable self-summary, “All my life/ I was a bride married to amazement.”

In 2006 Loyola Press issued its parallel to Housden in *Twenty Poems to Nourish Your Soul*, by Judith Valente and Charles Reynard. The poems, by writers of our times, are both striking and accessible, and the brief alternating essays help us absorb and understand them. Valente, a professional journalist, and Reynard, a judge in Illinois, do not give us close readings of the poems or artistic commentary so much as ruminations upon them, with light from their own ups and downs. (We learn in these pages that the bond of poetry drew the pair eventually to the altar.)

Reynard and Valente have spotted and presented good poems unfamiliar to us, and made us linger with them. Among these is “To the Mistakes” by W. S. Merwin, his grateful address to whatever mistakes he has made. It ends: “I must have needed/ the ones who led me/ in spite of all that/ was said about you/ placing my footsteps/ on the only way.” Read again, carefully. **A**



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Book Reviews

Unity Amid Plurality

Ecclesial Existence

Christian Community in History Volume 3

By Roger Haight, S.J.

Continuum. 300p \$48

ISBN 9780826429476

This is the third and final volume of a historical and systematic overview of comparative theologies of the church. A significant contribution to the contemporary debates on ecclesiology among the churches, it follows two comparative historical volumes, providing a theology “from below.”

As all the churches expand from a Eurocentric heritage, and diversity and pluralism offer both gifts and challenges, treating ecclesial existence from a perspective that is both ecumenically sensitive and culturally comprehensive is an unavoidable responsibility. All the churches make a distinction between the essential elements of ecclesiology given in divine revelation and those important but historically conditioned, changeable nonessentials. The churches and their theologians differ, however, as to where to make the distinction. Roger Haight, S.J., who currently teaches at Union Theological Seminary in New York, makes his own judgments on these matters, and each church and theologian will need to judge for themselves whether his proposals correspond to the “faith of the church through the ages.”

The exposition is based on a carefully worked out methodology and a modest, “transdenominational” perspective that claims to honor the particular ecclesiologies of the churches and to provide a comprehensive, generalized presentation. Such a theology “from below” comes from a developed methodology of the author, grounded in the experiential and historical perspective of Friedrich Schleiermacher.

One does not need to affirm the theory of symbol, the understanding of historical consciousness, the interpretation of pluralism or the visible-invisible distinction put forward by the author to appreci-

ate the historical scope and richness of interdisciplinary perspectives brought to bear on his theology of the church. He treats the themes of nature, mission, organization, membership, activities of the church and its relationship to the world in the context of this carefully crafted methodology and set of presuppositions, ending with a proposal about the relationships among the churches.

Even while claiming to write an ecclesiology that is drawn from a generalized comparative approach of the theologies of the churches and their biblical and historical sources, Haight frequently uses the word “should,” which can read more like admonition than theological argument. While he deals with the expected critiques of this sort of generalized, transdenominational presentation, he also presents judgments on a variety of theological dimensions of church life and doctrine that—in light of the methodology and presuppositions he has adopted—will be perceived to exclude the truth claims of particular believers and their churches. One example of this style of theology is his development of ministerial validity and recognition that would seem to exclude and even judge the motivation and the truth claims of some churches; he characterizes the barriers to his solution as “a failure to achieve a historical consciousness...and...a competitive spirit that thinks recognition of the other somehow compromises self-identity.”

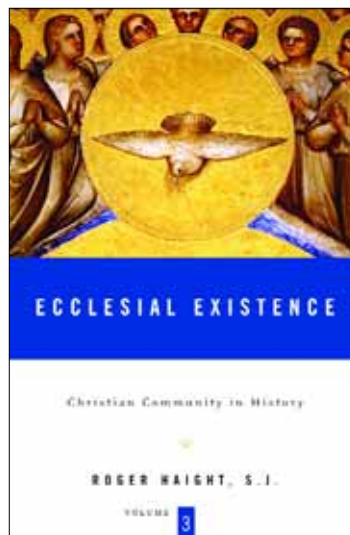
The author uses to good effect the World Council of Churches’ *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982) and *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005) and other convergence texts, produced by the theologians of the churches as a service to visible unity through dialogue. But Haight follows a different method from that proposed by the council. He proposes instead a normative ecclesiological formulation. The methodology of the World Council text, on the other hand, is inductive and descriptive, seeking from the

churches feedback to enhance the agreement and clarify differences among the churches, so that deeper convergences can be developed serving the unity among Christians.

The theological arguments in this volume will be of particular interest to Protestant scholars who consider their churches as “denominations,” since the proposal here is to provide a transdenominational ecclesiology. The Orthodox, confessional and some evangelical Protestant and Anglican scholars, who bring truth claims about the nature and mission of the church to the ecumenical dialogue, will find useful insights, but may feel themselves excluded by this methodology.

For the last 60 years the Orthodox and Protestant members of the World Council have recognized one another as in real—if imperfect—partial communion, a conviction that Catholics have also affirmed for 45 years. This recognition has made possible common spiritual exchange of gifts and common Christian witness in the world. These churches are also committed, in hope, to the full communion of the churches, grounded in faith in Christ’s prayer for the unity of Christians in service to the world. This faith vision and the support of church leadership for creative theological research has produced remarkable historic breakthroughs in ecclesiology—including some used in this volume: reform within the churches and full communion agreements among some of the Reformation churches. Haight does not share this vision, characterizing it as impractical.

As the churches move forward on the



The Reviewers

Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C. is Distinguished Professor of Ecumenical and Historical Theology at Memphis Theological Seminary, Memphis, Tenn.

Bill Williams is a freelance writer in West Hartford, Conn., and former editorial writer for The Hartford Courant. He is a member of the National Book Critics Circle.

pilgrimage toward Christian unity, three elements are crucial: the theological formulations of dialogues between church-appointed scholars, the response and reception of the churches themselves, and independent critique and creative formulations.

We can welcome this intentional probing of the nature and mission of the church, and the methodological debates to which it contributes. As a set of hypotheses to be tested by scholars in the churches and in the ecumenical field, it will undoubtedly engender much-needed discussion and, it is hoped, more convincing solutions to the divisions among Christians. Although some readers might find that this volume delivers less than it promises, the erudition manifest in *Ecclesial Existence* and its two predecessors will be greatly rewarding for many.

Jeffrey Gros

She Ignited the Crowds

This Little Light

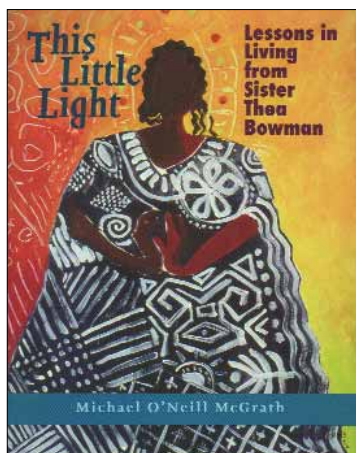
Lessons in Living from Sister Thea Bowman

By Michael O'Neill McGrath
Orbis. 96p \$20
ISBN 9781570757914

Michael O'Neill McGrath, O.S.F.S., had never heard of the Catholic nun and gospel singer Thea Bowman while she was alive, but once he discovered her, as we learn in this splendid short memoir, she transformed his life.

"I like to tell folks that I have a little black nun inside of me," McGrath writes. "She's my muse, my spiritual friend and inspiration."

McGrath was caring for his dying father when he read a magazine interview recorded shortly before Bowman died in 1990 of breast cancer. He was immediately captivated by "her charm and the eloquence of her words." He later



watched a video about Bowman that stimulated his artistic bent and led to an outpouring of modernistic paintings, some of which grace the pages of this beautifully produced book.

Sister Bowman grew up in segregated Mississippi in the 1940s. After the local Catholic diocese opened a mission in her town, she asked to be baptized and became a Catholic at age 10. Later, under the influence of four white Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, who had come from Wisconsin to open a Catholic school, she decided to become a nun, taking the name Sister Thea, which means "of God."

She eventually obtained a doctorate from The Catholic University of America, taught college and became a popular speaker, giving more than 100 presentations a year in America and Africa. She also inspired people with her renditions of popular slave spirituals.

"When Thea got the crowds on their feet, moving, swaying, leading them in song, she wasn't merely entertaining them, she was transforming them, moving their hearts and filling their tired, restless spirits with the love of God," writes McGrath, who lives in Philadelphia, where he pursues his career as an artist and a member of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales.

Woven into this graceful account is the cold reality of life in the Jim Crow South, which infected the Catholic Church, as it did the rest of society. Catholic churches had "colored only" pews, as well as separate sections in the rear where African-Americans could receive Communion "far from the altar rail where whites received."

Urgency

Fear not, young woman,
the mystery I tell you.
Yield and fear not.

The unfathomable
will be in swaddling clothes,
a cloth wrap,

and the unknown be known
curled into infancy,
heaven in flesh.

From the impinging dark
a love note hurries,
all thanks to you.

James Torrens

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

After Bowman was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 47, she cut back her speaking schedule but not her determination. "I'm going to live 'til I die" became her credo.

The year before she died, Bowman delivered a rousing speech from her wheelchair at the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on the topic "To Be Black and Catholic." She "dazzled and captivated" the bishops and ended with a poignant rendition of "We Shall Overcome," with the bishops on their feet singing with her.

Perhaps the book's most moving story, though, involves an incident just weeks before Bowman died.

She was bedridden and clinging to life when 40 members of the Jubilee Singers, a group she had directed, crammed into the living room of her Mississippi home to sing gospel songs. During an emotional goodbye, the choir director mentioned

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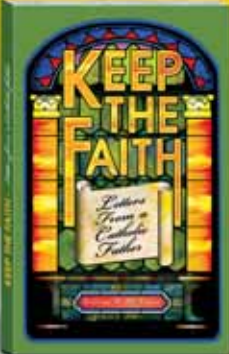
that the group planned to stop at the local McDonald's. They were seated for lunch when they noticed a car pull into the parking lot, with a frail Sister Bowman in the back seat. The group left the restaurant, surrounded the car and sang "Deep River," one of her favorite spirituals.

This Little Light should appeal to all age groups, starting with students in the middle grades. Parents might profitably read it aloud to their children, giving families a chance to discuss the spiritual and societal issues presented in the life of an extraordinary woman.

Many readers probably will be discovering Sister Bowman for the first time. One hopes that McGrath or another author will eventually write a fuller biography of this inspiring icon. Such an account might look deeper into the racism that enveloped society during Sister Bowman's formative years, and how she was able to respond with compassion, forgiveness and peace instead of succumbing to hatred or violence. **Bill Williams**



A remembrance of Sister Thea Bowman from 1990, at americamagazine.org/pages.



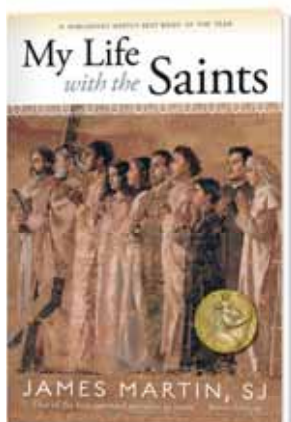
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Books in Brief

Christmas Poems

New Directions. 96p \$11.95

A wonderful stocking stuffer, this collection of Christmas poems, carols and ballads (assembled by the publisher) draws from the literature of many places and times—spanning, in fact, almost 2,000 years. Its contents of 84 entries very tidily provide seven reflections for each of the 12 days of Christmas. At times such as this, when people are beset with a host of woes and worries, poetry and prayer are reliable anchors for a flagging spirit. And only the “best of the best” will do for that: Denise Levertov (“The Holy One, Blessed Be He...”) Alfred Lord Tennyson (“Ring Out, Wild Bells!”), John Donne (“Nativity”), Marie Ponsot (“Gigue for Christmas Eve”) and the traditional “Veni, Veni Emmanuel” are just a few. Tennyson’s words, it would seem, offer a message to us in the here and now: “Ring out a slowly dying cause,/ And ancient forms of party strife;/ Ring in the nobler modes of life,/ With sweeter manners, purer laws.”

P.A.K.

A Child’s Christmas in Wales

By Dylan Thomas

New Directions. 64p \$9.95

First published by New Directions in 1954, Dylan Thomas’s child’s-eye view of Christmas in Wales has earned its reputation as a holiday classic. Recounting the delight he experienced in childhood with uncommon lyrical grace, Thomas conveys the spirit of the season with all the breathless wonder of youth. He presents a panoply of Christmas treasures: “Mistletoe hung from the gas brackets in all the front parlors; there was sherry and walnuts and bottled beer and crackers by the dessertspoons; and cats in their furabouts watched the fires and the high-heaped fire spat, all ready for the chestnuts and the mulling pokers.” (There are many such lengthy sentences broken up only by the occasional comma or semicolon.) An imaginative view of a snowball fight transforms the author and a friend from two

children into fur trappers from Hudson Bay; and a caroling mission becomes a perilous “snow-blind” journey along which he and his friends face the threat of “he-hippos” and are heralded by dogs “baying ‘Excelsior.’” Thomas only hints at darker facets (aunts “poised and brittle,” unwanted by anyone; poor children with “bare red fingers”), leaving them, as a child would, as part of the *mise-en-scène* instead of making them objects of pity. Creating a world insulated from grief and cynicism, *A Child’s Christmas in Wales* is the perfect way to revisit the youthful excitement of Christmas, but with an appreciation that comes only with maturity.

R.N.

In the Footsteps of Abraham The Holy Land in Hand-Painted Photographs

By Richard Hardiman and Helen Speelman
Overlook Press. 364p \$65

If you are looking for a deluxe item for Christmas gift-giving, look no further. A spectacular and captivating book, this volume contains 180 hand-colored photographs (from a collection of 1,200) of the Holy Land, taken by the Matson Photo Agency, a part of Jerusalem’s American Colony, at the turn of the last century before color photography came to be. The history and international displays of these photos (originally glass plates), and the painstaking process of adding color, are as fascinating as the world and people they so strikingly depict. Richard Hardiman teaches at Hebrew University in Jerusalem; Helen Speelman is an artist and granddaughter of Arie Speelman, who commissioned these colored renditions. And there is generous textual commentary prefacing each of the book’s eight sections. We travel from Jaffa to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, Galilee and much more. Village life comes palpably alive, evoking Jesus’ own time. Included too are numerous depictions of the Bedouin and their practices, homes and families at work or play, beggars and shepherds, potters and carpenters, synagogues and mosques. The book is a veritable pilgrimage to first-century Palestine, a close look into history that will be cherished by all people of the Book.

P.A.K.

Take it to the Queen

A Tale of Hope

By Josephine Nobisso

Illustrated by Katalin Szegegi
Gingerbread House. 32p \$17.95 (cloth)

The Weight of a Mass

A Tale of Faith

By Josephine Nobisso

Illustrated by Katalin Szegegi
Gingerbread House. 32p \$9.95 (paperback)

What a pleasant surprise I received when these books crossed my desk unbidden. Though I was acquainted (in name only) with the publisher, I had never heard of Josephine Nobisso. It turns out she is an award-winning educator, and her books are award-winners too. Recognized by the National Catholic Educational Association as well as the Catholic Press Association, author and books display a clear grounding in deep faith. *Queen* (just published this month) and *Mass* (originally published in hardcover in 2003) are fables for children, each with a specific lesson or “take-away.” The former tells the story of once-favored villagers who transgress against their King and wind up losing all their resources. Finally, in repentance and regret, they seek the intercession of the gentle and kind Queen. And, of course, all is forgiven and restored to the people, who learned a valuable lesson about trust, greed and more. *Mass* is a powerful, moving tale about a poor widow seeking a crust of bread, a wealthy but stingy baker, a royal wedding and the faith of the baker’s son. The books are handsomely designed, the full-color drawings sharply detailed. Parents and children alike have a surprising treat in store.

P.A.K.

Books in Brief is written by Patricia A. Kossmann, literary editor of *America*, and Regina Nigro, literary assistant.



The editors reflect on
Advent and Christmas
at americamagazine.org/video.

Classifieds

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it; demonstrate successful experience in Catholic, public or independent school administration; have teaching experience; and be a person of the Catholic faith. Position is available July 1, 2009. Salary is competitive and commensurate with experience.

Interested and qualified candidates are asked to submit electronically a letter of introduction, a résumé and a statement concerning the significance and importance of Catholic secondary education for young women, as well as the names, addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of five professional references to: Divine Savior Holy Angels High School, Principal Search, Catholic School Management Inc., Attn: Lois K. Draina, at office@catholicsschoolmgmt.com. Review of applications will begin Jan. 15, 2009, and continue until the position is filled.

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Letters

A Return to Collegiality

Thank you for your strong endorsement of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (Current Comment, 12/8). It should be noted that in recent years the Vatican, operating on a narrower understanding of episcopal collegiality, has limited the authority of such conferences. At the same time, after a quite public campaign against the pro-collegiality policies of the so-called Bernardin era, conservative leaders succeeded in drastically reducing the U.S.C.C.B. budget and staff. In the wake of the recent election, conservative leaders have signaled a renewed attack on the U.S.C.C.B. document *Faithful Citizenship* and the collegial approach it represents.

Readers might consider doing something to support episcopal collegiality, shared responsibility, the U.S.C.C.B. and the consistent ethic of life by speaking up and by joining such groups as Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good.

David O'Brien
Professor Emeritus
College of the Holy Cross
Worcester, Mass.

New Wineskins

As I read Daniel Cere's review of Anne Rice's fascinating story of her return to Catholicism, *Called Out of Darkness* (Book Reviews, 12/1), I grew worried to discover that Rice "concludes her spiritual memoir by addressing a set of challenging issues that have been at the heart of her fiction and at the center of cultural and religious debates, namely conflicts over gender and sexuality."

I feared the story of another returnee to Rome who immediately begins railing for the exclusion of others, forgetting his/her own long journey and misgivings on the way back to the church.

How refreshing to read instead that Rice finds the heart of Catholicism in its aesthetic and sensual elements, rather than in clinging to the tangles of church law or an angry theology of exclusion. She is a writer of extraordinary sensitivity, one who could do much to help estranged Catholics in a way that a more defensive apologetics never will.

Jacob Powers
El Segundo, Calif.

Method to Madness

In your comments on the television show "Mad Men" (Current Comment, 11/17), you failed to recognize a secular spirituality expressed in the show that is rooted in the lives of laity raising families and making their living in the workplace. Beyond the "Catholic sensibility" referred to, there is much more that speaks to searching for, and sometimes finding, our living God.

I am sure there is much in "Mad Men" to criticize. But for me, one who raised a family of seven and worked in the "real world" of corporate management for 35 years, the show rings true. And if we believe in a caring and loving God, the scripts speak to how God touches lives in so many subtle ways—ways often not recognized by the church, but authentic just the same.

Art Maurer
Pensfield, N.J.

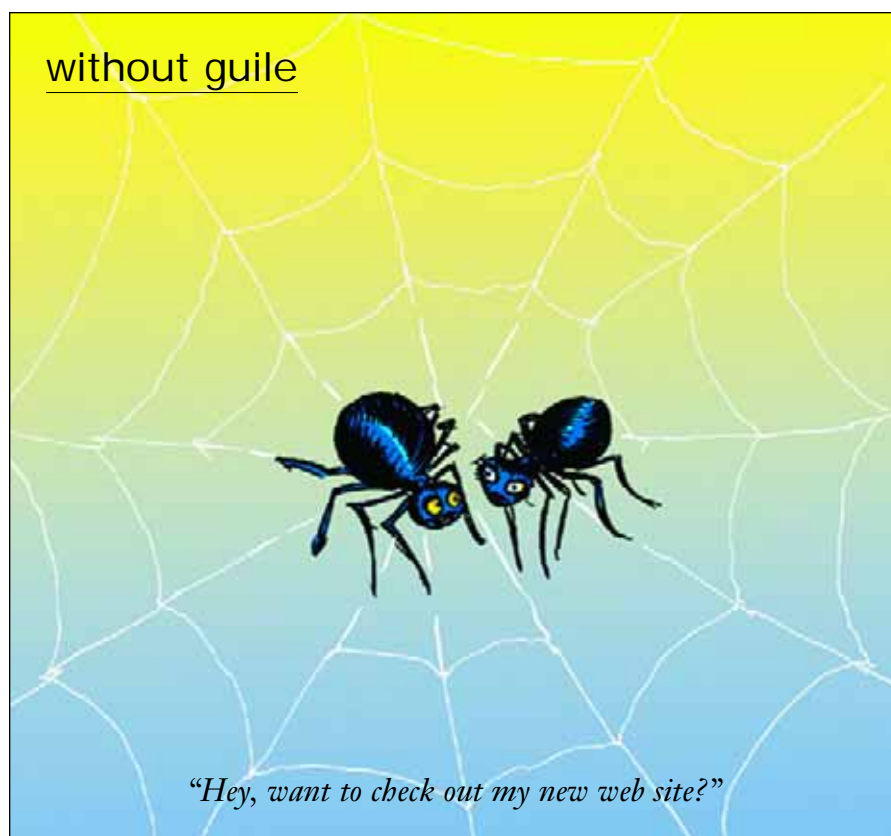
Promises, Promises

While I agreed with most of "Mr. Obama's Promise" (Editorial, 11/17), I was extremely upset that you did not even mention Obama's other promise: that the first thing he will do as president is to sign the Freedom of Choice Act. This act will bring back partial-birth abortion and could invalidate all the state laws for which pro-life groups (I am a member of several) fought so hard. Leaving this promise out of your editorial was a serious omission.

Charles R. Scally
Chalfont, Pa.

Send in the Clowns

I found Franco Mormando's review of the recent art exhibit of the works of Georges Rouault ("Of Clowns and Christian Conscience," 11/24) a forceful one, in which art was closely linked with prayer. Thank you for reintroducing me



CARTOON BY RICK PARKER

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Letters

to an artist who has always been on the edge of my consciousness but now will be fully present.

*Charles Novo
Houston, Tex.*

Sing for Your Supper

Many thanks to James J. DiGiacomo, S.J., for his beautiful thoughts on Advent in "We Should Have Seen It Coming" (12/1). I agree that Advent is a time to be watchful for goodness, to embrace those who are different, to smile and bring compassion, understanding and mercy to those who are hurting. Also, it is a great time to teach children to be generous by encouraging them to write notes to soldiers or distant relatives, to pray around the Advent wreath, to prepare crafts for decorating and to "sing for their supper" with all those beautiful Christmas songs!

*Alice Englert
Warrenton, Va.*

A House Divided

Gregory D. Foster's argument for selective conscientious objection for soldiers ("One War at a Time," 11/17) will become required reading for my high school theology students. As a teacher and pastoral minister, I find it impossible to encourage students to join the military, because there is no recourse to selective conscientious objection. The pope and the U.S. Catholic bishops argued that the invasion of Iraq would not be morally justifiable. What is a Catholic soldier to do? She/he is put in the untenable position of having to be faithful to the guidance of the church or to the orders of his superiors.

Foster's article clearly reiterates what the bishops have already said, but does so from the perspective of a man with extensive military experience. Perhaps the bishops should join their voices with new urgency on this important issue.

*Tony Marinelli
Westbury, N.Y.*

Preferential Option

Kudos for your special issue on military chaplaincy (11/17). Any priest who feels the call to minister among people living in poverty should consider a few years of

military chaplaincy. There are an awful lot of poor people serving in our armed forces.

*Jeffry Odell Korgen
Montclair, N.J.*

Loud and Clear

I agree with Drew Christiansen, S.J., that the documents of the U.S.C.C.B. are not widely disseminated or read despite the important, often prophetic insights they can contain (Of Many Things, 10/20). But by facilitating a narrow discussion between themselves and a few experts rather than a broad, fully engaged Catholic debate about serious ethical issues in the political arena, the U.S. bishops have undercut their own role as teachers and pastors. More seriously, they have failed to hold the United States (including all of us who are citizens) to account for failing to follow the guidance they have given.

The military budget decried by the bishops in 1993 was a "mere" \$275 billion a year; how can it be that the bishops are not furious over the \$800 billion we now pour yearly into those same coffers? Similarly, in 1973 and 1983 the bishops agreed to the "strictly conditioned" possession of nuclear weapons by the United States, but 35 years later those conditions have not been met. Why have the bishops not publicly withdrawn their support of nuclear deterrence?

A third example is the current war in Iraq, which the bishops quite clearly said did not meet the criteria for a just war; but why, once the war began, did they not make that assessment crystal clear to policy makers, Catholics and the general

public?

Not all bishops are called to be prophets, perhaps; but as teachers, pastors and religious leaders, they should have a voice that can be heard.

*Marie Dennis
Washington, D.C.*

Q & A

In Doris Donnelly's interview of Mary Ann Glendon ("Soft Power and Hope," 11/24), the U.S. ambassador to the Holy See sees the three visits of Pope Benedict XVI with President George W. Bush in little over one calendar year as "outward symbols of the close correspondence between the president and the Holy Father" and thinks that there has never been "more synergy of interest between the United States and the Holy See than there is now."

What does Glendon have in mind? Is the conformity between the two about a preferential option for the poor, a just minimum wage, medical coverage for all and respect for civil liberties and human rights? Or is the synergy of interest about an unjust war, secret renditions, spying on one's own citizens, subverting the U.S. Constitution, politicizing every department of government and abetting the pollution of the environment?

Since Glendon appears eager to minimize the significance of the Bush administration's torture policies by comparing them to the presumed behavior of other countries, we are left to wonder about the answers to these and other questions.

*David L. Smith, C.S.S.P.
Pittsburgh, Pa.*

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The Word

A Dwelling Place for God

Fourth Sunday of Advent (B), Dec. 21, 2008

Readings: 2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Ps 89:2-5, 27, 29; Rom 16:25-27; Lk 1:26-38

"Nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37)

AS CHRISTMAS APPROACHES, the readings for the Fourth Sunday of Advent focus our attention on the notion of a dwelling place for God.

In the first reading, King David finds himself free, in that he no longer has to fight his enemies. Instead, he can devote his energy to whatever he likes, so he plans to build a beautiful palace for himself and a splendid temple for God. At first the prophet Nathan approves this plan, but then he hears a word from God that turns the plan upside down: "Should *you* build *me* a house to dwell in?" God explains that all the success David has had is God's doing, which now culminates in God's establishing a house, that is, a dynasty, for David. There is a play on the word "house," as it shifts in meaning: from David's palace to God's temple to the Davidic ruling line. Underlying the text is a criticism of the monarchy.

In the verses omitted from the Lectionary selection (vv. 6-7a), God objects that YHWH has never asked any of the leaders of Israel to build a temple: "I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle." God has been on the move, dwelling with the Israelites in the same way they themselves have lived—in makeshift tents as they traversed the desert between Egypt and Canaan. And God has been present in a portable tabernacle that they carried with them wherever they sojourned.

In the Gospel reading for the last Sunday of Advent, Gabriel's message to Mary is that God now takes up residence in human flesh.

The message is brought to fulfillment

BARBARA E. REID, O.P., is a professor of New Testament Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Ill.

in the Christmas readings. The Gospel for Christmas day, the Prologue of John's Gospel, reaches its high point with v. 14, "and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The Greek verb *eskenosen* literally means "pitched his tent." God's predilection is to dwell with human beings in their ordinary dwellings and in their same human flesh. While there is a place for magnificent temples and churches where we can gather as a people to glorify God, the Holy One would have us first recognize that divinity walks around in our midst in human skin.

Moreover, those who are least impressive by human standards are the most favored by God when it comes to reveal-

Praying With Scripture

- When have you experienced God dwelling with you in difficult circumstances?
- When have you most felt favored by God?
- Who reveals to you the mysterious presence of God in human flesh?

ing God's mystery. David, for example, was the youngest, least qualified son, when God took him from pasturing sheep to lead his people. Mary was an ordinary young woman making wedding plans in an insignificant little town in Galilee, when she was asked to take on a seemingly impossible role.

In both the first reading and the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, there is a startling twist: it is not we who make dwelling places for God, but God who builds the house. Likewise, on Christmas day, John's Gospel speaks not only of how wondrous it is that God takes on the form of a human child, but also of how our reception of the Word enables us to become children of God. We keep on

becoming a child of God by receiving this lowly child, not only the one in the manger, but all those who seem insignificant all around us.

The scene of the annunciation to Mary is a subject of much Christian art. Oftentimes Mary is portrayed as serenely praying and surrounded with light and joy. But in other annunciation scenes there is an undercurrent of distress, incomprehension and scandal in this story. Henry Ossawa Tanner captures this sense in his painting, "The Annunciation," in which Mary sits at the edge of her disheveled bed, with a look of puzzlement and concern, while gazing toward a golden beam in the form of a cross. Megan Marlatt's fresco "The Annunciation" in St. Michael's Chapel at Rutgers University likewise depicts the topsy-turvy aspect of the event, as the angel appears upside down, uttering the word "Blessed" backwards. Mary's life, as she thought it would be, is entirely upended, which is greatly troubling.

What God is asking is incomprehensible. Mary questions how it can be. In addition, in her tiny village, where everyone knows everyone else and many people are related to one another, everyone knows that she and the man who is already her legal husband have not yet begun to live together. But all of them can count on nine. What will they say about her, what kinds of nasty looks will they cast her way



ART BY TAD DUNNE

when her precious child is born too soon?

While not spelling out how, Gabriel reassures Mary that in the midst of this messy situation, God will bring forth blessing, holiness and salvation for all. Twice God's messenger assures her that she is grace-filled and is favored in God's sight, even if others will question this. He also reassures her that she is not alone. Her relative, Elizabeth, will help mentor and support her. Without knowing how God will accomplish all this, Mary opens a space for God to dwell within her, enabling the divine to make a new home within all humankind.

Mary makes a physical home for the Holy One in her womb; hers was a unique role. But we too are asked by God to make a dwelling place within ourselves and within our world for the Christ. The circumstances are always messy. It is not in glorious buildings beautifully adorned but in the humblest of persons, in the most difficult of circumstances, that God takes up residence. The irony is that in trying times we may feel abandoned by God, or question why it is that God is punishing us, or why we have lost God's favor. It is precisely in such times that God dwells most intimately with us, assuring us that we are full of grace and favor, asking us to trust that God can and will bring forth blessing, even if we cannot see how.

Many of our ancestors in the faith were called "favored" by God: Noah (Gn 6:8), Moses (Ex 33:12-17), Gideon (Jgs 6:17) and Samuel (1 Sm 2:26). God always asks a great deal of "favored" ones. Moses, for example, found it so burdensome at one point that he prayed God would do him the "favor" of killing him at once, so he need no longer face the distress of leading a difficult people (Nm 11:15). Mary is right to be troubled when Gabriel calls her "favored" one.

But God's "favor" is also accompanied by God's power and protecting Spirit. Jesus, too, has "the favor of God" upon him (Lk 2:40, 52), a favor that extends to all who receive him, as John's Gospel says in the Christmas reading: "grace upon grace," or "favor upon favor" (Jn 1:16). Likewise, in the Gospel for Christmas Midnight Mass, the shepherds sing of the peace now manifest for all those favored by God (Lk 2:14)—that is, all who make room in their "inns" for this unlikely Coming One.

Barbara E. Reid



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