America
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Science and the Path to Parenthood

JULIE IRWIN ZIMMERMAN

OF MANY THINGS

One ought to reserve an hour a week for receiving letters," Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote, "and afterwards take a bath." Nietzsche, who called the postman "the agent of rude surprises," found an unexpected letter sullied his day and spoiled his work.

We receive upwards of 90 letters a week at **America**, and among my tasks is the pleasurable duty of culling that herd for letters suitable for publication. This correspondence comes in every form imaginable—handwritten, banged out on manual typewriters, e-mailed, scribbled on twice-used stationery or posted on our Web site. Some letters are anonymous, some signed with a flourish and some, in the words of a fellow editor, "obviously written after 7 p.m." Going through the stack each week can be a profound education in rhetoric, polemic, grammar and the curious Internet-influenced jargon of a new generation of readers.

One always finds old friends in the batch, faithful correspondents who regularly offer **America**'s editors their suggestions and opinions free of charge. Over time they have become a comfort to this editor, like an old shoe, predictable and reliable. When they go on vacation or run out of typewriter ribbon, I worry: Is it family trouble? Poor health? A few days of held breath are usually rewarded with another missive; sometimes they even tell me why they've been gone.

Less common are those letters demanding, "Cancel my subscription immediately!" What to do with these? Are they an expression of an honest desire never to see **America** grace their mailbox again? Or just fits of pique? The late William F. Buckley penned the punchiest riposte possible after receiving a letter from an enraged reader in April 1972 demanding his subscription to The National Review be cancelled: "Cancel your own goddam subscription. Cordially, WFB."

My favorite letter included the following lines (edited for grammar, spelling, vulgarity and sense): "Please provide me with James T. Keane, S.J.'s e-mail address. I suppose the S.J. stands for Stupid Jackass, which this imbecile must be. I'd like to correspond with him to tell him exactly how I feel!" Further correspondence seemed unnecessary; how the author felt was obvious already. But it's nice to get mail.

Online comments are another matter. We require that all comments include a valid name and e-mail address, and yet every day a reader or two tries to sneak a comment past our watchful eyes with names like "An Atheist With a Brain" or "Pope Benedict." Sometimes their e-mail addresses are just as creative. My favorite is the fellow who posts as "noreply@noreply.com." To him we offer…no reply. And cancel your own subscription. Unless you really are Pope Benedict.

A century of publication has also left **America** with a vast repository of past letters. These were often suspiciously positive, sometimes little more than a paragraph of fulsome praise. Were our interlocutors more polite in those days? Or did the editors have a soft spot for grateful readers? "Were I forced to curtail expenses," wrote a priest from Illinois in 1909, **America** "would be absolutely the last that would be given up." Again, it's nice to get mail, but God help that man's parishioners.

But we still like praise, and readers too, especially as our subscribers face a new era of cost-cutting and hard decisions about expenses. We try to be a bit more fair these days, so readers should feel as welcome to bury Caesar as to praise him. And this gets to Nietzsche's most grievous fault: He never figured out that the greatest secret to this gay science is perhaps to have a sense of humor about it all. And sometimes, dear reader, what you've got to tell us is absolutely correct. **JAMES T. KEANE, S.J.**

America

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ON THE WEB

A slideshow of photographs from the life of **Daniel Berrigan, S.J.**, (right), and Julie Irwin Zimmerman talks about **struggling with infertility** on our podcast. Plus, Rob Weinert-Kendt reviews the play **"Ruined."**
All at americamagazine.org.

Iran's Bloody June

The horrifying image of the 26-year-old student protester Neda Agha-Soltan bleeding to death on a Tehran street has outraged the world. Tens of thousands of Iranians like Neda had gathered in the capital simply to seek a redress of their grievance: the near certainty that the government had rigged the recent presidential election. The government's brutal response to the protest is indefensible, morally indistinguishable from the 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square or the Soviet slaughter in Budapest in 1956.

Some have argued that President Obama moved too slowly to declare emphatically America's moral solidarity with the protestors. Mr. Obama, recognizing the difference between Washington politics and statecraft, chose instead a measured response that registered America's condemnation but accounted for the paucity of hard intelligence. In the last century, the United States made a significant contribution to the erosion of Iranian democracy, a historical fact that has allowed Tehran's leaders to use the United States as a scapegoat for decades. Mr. Obama judged correctly that an all-out U.S. diplomatic offensive carried a greater risk of worsening the situation than of improving it.

For now, the administration's strategy is to do no harm. Yet the double-quick march of events means that the administration may soon have new opportunities to act. A successful diplomatic challenge, however, will require a multilateral approach, with the active participation of states like Turkey, which have at least some credibility with the Iranian people. The final outcome of the protests is unclear. But the bravery of Iranians like Neda Agha-Soltan certainly marks a new beginning for Iranian politics and is the latest testament to the strength of the human spirit and its unyielding aspiration for freedom.

Twittering in Tehran

Jack Dorsey, the co-founder and chairman of Twitter, was interviewed in May at the Catholic Media Convention in Anaheim, Calif. Twitter is an online social networking service that allows users to send and receive short messages of not more than 140 characters, which are relayed by computer or cellphone. Dorsey projected that users would shape the future direction of the company. He said he had just returned from Iraq, where he had explored how Twitter might meet the communication needs of that population.

Just a few weeks later Iraq's neighbor, Iran, found an important and historic use for Twitter. Roused by the declaration that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had won the presidency in a landslide, incredulous voters took to the streets. Using Twitter, thousands of Iranians sent micromessages to the outside world, like: "Confirmed. Army moving into Tehran against protesters"—some with an accompanying photo or video link. Twitter's ad slogan "What are you doing?" took on new meaning once the Iranian government cracked down on protesters and constrained journalists. Still, Dorsey's notion that users would shape the direction of his company seems prescient: a service that once conveyed the merely trivial ("Had a tasty lunch") has played, and may continue to play, a vital role in global liberation.

Military Spending Soars

Economic downturns notwithstanding, global military spending set a dark new record in 2008. The yearly report of the International Peace Research Institute in Stockholm, released June 8, notes that the total expenditure of $1.5 trillion represents a 4 percent increase from 2007 and a huge jump of 45 percent over the 1999-2008 decade. The United States was responsible for over half the increase during that decade. China now holds second place. Other countries, such as India, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, Brazil, South Korea and the United Kingdom, also devoted more to military expenditures.

The head of the Stockholm military expenditure project, Sam Perlo-Freeman, said that the war on terror has "encouraged many countries to see their problems through a highly militarized lens, using this to justify high military spending." He added that "the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost $903 billion in additional spending by the U.S.A. alone."

One positive expectation is that reduced demand may lie ahead as governments feel more pressure from rising budget deficits. Under President Obama, too, U.S. arms expenditures may increase less sharply than they did during the Bush administration. Nevertheless, with the United Nations reporting that the number of hungry people rose by 100 million since last year, what governments lavish on military expenditures could be better used for basic human needs.

Editor's Note: ***America*** *will no longer publish an index in its print edition. Past issues can be searched at the archives on* ***America****'s Web site (www.americamagazine.org) or through the many print and electronic indexes of periodicals available in public and institutional libraries.*

EDITORIAL

At Life's Beginning

For millennia childbirth was a mystery akin to death and just as unpredictable. Children were a blessing from God, and childlessness was seen as an affliction that could be remedied only by divine intervention. Today, prospective parents may exercise far more control over the reproductive process, but medical advancements bring with them a host of ethical quandaries. In *Dignitas Personae* (December 2008), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith offers moral instruction on reproductive ethics, but the very technical nature of these questions, together with the strong pressures exerted by the medical industry, still leaves couples bewildered. Here is an opportunity for pastoral leaders to reach out with sensitivity and compassion, ever mindful of the ultimate role God plays in our creation.

The longing for a child is an ancient theme found throughout the Bible. Think of Hannah, despondent before the miraculous birth of Samuel, or Sarah, greeting the news of her impending pregnancy with a skeptical, world-weary laugh. The anguish these women knew is manifest today in the thousands of couples who seek assistance from the rapidly growing fertility industry. The goal of helping couples to conceive is a laudable one, but the fertility industry is moving far beyond its original purpose, pursuing conception with seemingly little concern for the moral cost. The birth of octuplets to a single mother with six other children earlier this year may be an extreme example of the industry's excess, but there are other troubling signs. At the Fertility Institute in Los Angeles, for example, couples can now choose their child's sex and eye color. News reports have greeted these developments with appropriate skepticism, a sign that human intuition may ultimately serve as a check on genetic experimentation. Yet it should not take such extreme cases to spark a moral debate.

Unlike countries such as Italy, in the United States fertility clinics are largely unregulated, and the rapid pace of technology suggests further growth. Fertility clinics in the United States are already home to over 500,000 frozen embryos, and the numbers are likely to swell, spurred by an industry that profits handsomely from expensive procedures. Most frozen embryos are left over from in vitro fertilization, the procedure by which an egg is combined with sperm in a laboratory setting. Only a select number of fertilized eggs are implanted in the mother's womb; the rest are stored, some for future use. The vast majority remain frozen, however, with both couples and clinics reluctant to destroy them outright—an implicit recognition, perhaps, that they are more than just cells in a petri dish.

The moral dilemmas raised by childbirth do not end with conception. With little controversy or moral discussion, genetic screening has become a regular part of prenatal care. As a result, the abortion of children with genetic disorders has become frighteningly routine. According to studies, just over 90 percent of children in the United States diagnosed in utero with Down syndrome are aborted, a practice the columnist George F. Will has called "eugenics by abortion." Slowly and quietly our society is being diminished, driven by the too widespread belief that medical science is the ultimate arbiter of these grave decisions.

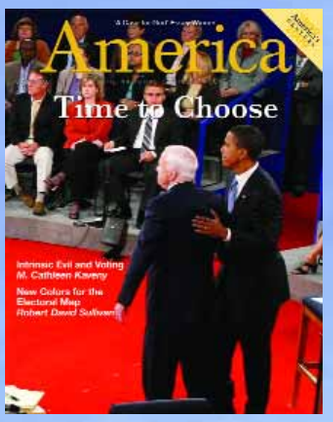
To curtail practices that are so widespread calls for vigorous evangelization as well as regulation. Indeed, the rapid growth of medical technologies presents a serious challenge for the7 church's teaching on life itself. Is every new life a blessing, one to be welcomed no matter what form it may take? The church rightly calls upon us to answer with an emphatic yes. But how far should one go to bring life about? *Dignitas Personae* reiterates church teaching that the creation of human life properly belongs to the marital act. Yet if we judge by the number of frozen embryos in the United States, the church's message is not being heard. The widespread use of genetic screening is an even more alarming sign that the church's call to care for the frail and vulnerable is going unheeded.

Couples facing infertility or the challenges of caring for a disabled child may understandably feel isolated and overwhelmed. In our culture, it is not surprising that they look to science for assistance. The church can serve as an important ally in guiding them to a life-affirming decision, whether it is ethical fertility treatment, adoption or long-term disability care [see page 13 in this issue]. Perhaps the most effective witness pastoral counselors can offer is simply to listen, always attentive to signs of the Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, at work. Scientific advancements have reduced infant mortality and enhanced life for children in myriad ways. Yet medicine cannot alleviate all of life's suffering, and one must be wary of scientific attempts to shape life at its earliest stages. The Creator's words from Jeremiah still resonate: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you."

America

Winner of the Catholic Press Association Awards for 2009

We are pleased to announce that America has won 13 awards.



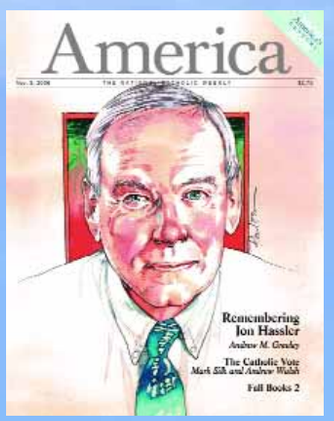
FIRST PLACE

Web Site: americamagazine.org

Best Investigative Writing: “Our Moral Duty in Iraq”
Gerard F. Powers (Feb. 18, 2008)

Best Review Section: Fall Books II (Nov. 3, 2008)

Best Online/Multi-Media Presentation of Visuals:
“Artful Contemplation,” Karen Sue Smith



SECOND PLACE

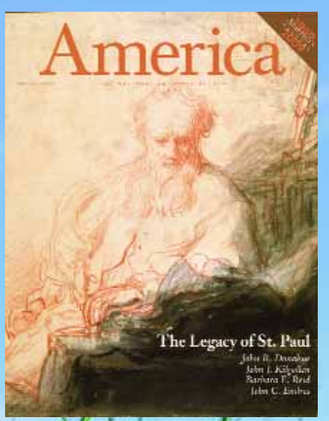
Best Editorial: “The Art of the Possible” (Dec. 15, 2008)

Best Article: “Shadows in Prayer,” James Martin, S.J. (March 17, 2008)

Best Investigative Writing: “Curbing Medical Costs,”
Daniel Callahan (March 10, 2008)

Best Poetry: “Going,” Michael F. Suarez, S.J. (June 9, 2008)

Best Photo Story: “Northern Light,” Sheryl Frances Chen (April 14, 2008)



THIRD PLACE

General Excellence: Issues dated Oct. 27, Nov. 3 and Nov. 10

Best Regular Column: “Woman and Child” and “Building Peace,”
Maryann Cusimano Love (March 31 and Dec. 8, 2008)

HONORABLE MENTION

Best Investigative Writing: “Five Myths About Nuclear Energy”
Kristin Shrader-Frechette (June 23, 2008)

In the “Associate & Individual Freelance Member” category, “The Joy of Transformation,” Greg Kandra (March 3, 2008) won a First Place award.

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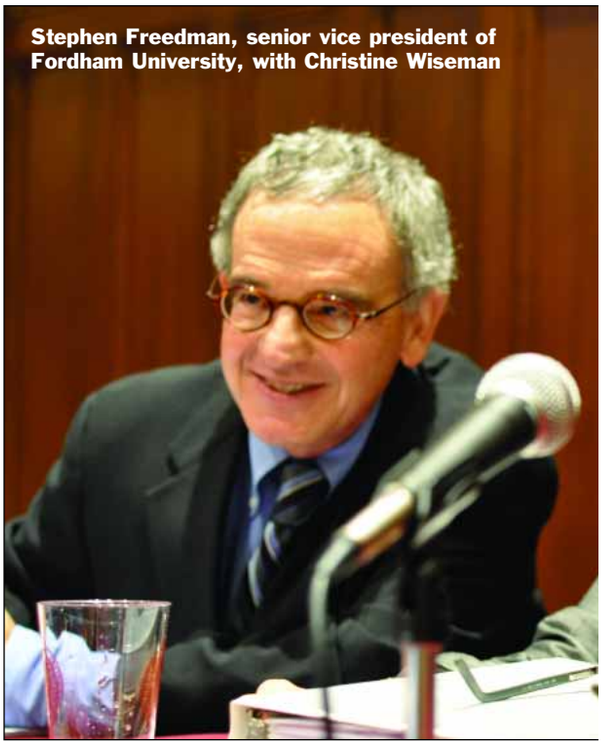
NEW YORK

Scholars Discuss Relationship Between Faith and Reason


Stephen Freedman, senior vice president of Fordham University, with Christine Wiseman

What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? This question, first asked by Tertullian in the third century, is perhaps the most famous articulation of a tension present in Christianity since its founding: the dialectic between faith and reason. A number of internationally recognized scholars came to Fordham University in New York in June to discuss how reason and faith intersect and clash, a topic that has been much debated in recent years in arenas ranging from popular culture to academia to papal addresses. Charles Taylor, John W. O'Malley, S.J., the Rev. Michael Himes and Christine Wiseman served as keynote speakers for the conference, entitled "Faith and Reason 2009: A Dialogue at the Heart of Jesuit Education," which was held from June 16 to 18 at Fordham's Rose Hill campus.

Adventures in Reason. Charles Taylor, a leading contemporary philosopher, began the conference with an address on "Reason and Its Adventures Since the Enlightenment," identifying some areas where societal trust in reason had taken a wrong turn in recent centuries. Two of his more prominent critiques dealt with the degree to which Western cultures accepted the notion of "reason alone" as a hermeneutical tool (as opposed to its traditional scholastic twinning with faith), and the overweening confidence placed in reason for the interpretation of reality and the betterment of human societies.

Ultimately, Taylor noted, even reason requires interpretation, reflection through tradition and community, and articulation by way of hunches, insights and even a kind of "epistemic faith" in order for it to be most useful. To elevate reason beyond its capabilities and limitations is to make it an idol just as much as any fideist or fundamentalist makes an idol of his or her particular articles of faith.

Four Western Cultures. The historian John W. O'Malley, S.J., of Georgetown University, followed the next morning with "Reason in Four Cultures: the Prophetic, the Analytic/Scientific, the Humanistic, and the Artistic/Performative." O'Malley asserted that medieval universities traditionally were rather secular enterprises, in the sense that their goal was largely the practical education of students, and it was only with the humanist-inspired development of the "college" that the notion of training well-rounded students for the benefit of the common good became popular. The Jesuits in particular excelled at the development of these smaller colleges devoted to a Renaissance curriculum.

O'Malley also discussed the nature and mission of contemporary American Catholic universities, stressing that they not only have a social responsibility, but that part of that responsibility is to teach and treat the subject of religion honestly and with rigor. While professional schools and graduate programs might seek to train students for specific careers, the humanities should retain their pride of place at the undergraduate level. And it is still possible, O'Malley declared, for a university "to be both secular and Catholic."

Perspectives on Faith. The Rev. Michael Himes, a theologian at Boston College, spoke next on "Faith and Its Adventures Since the Enlightenment," defining faith as more than simply adherence to a statement of belief; it is also an act of allegiance and an incorporation into a body of believers.

Since the Enlightenment, Himes noted, faith has been considered to be in conflict with reason not only because the religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries spurred a desire for a "universal religion" based on reason, but because the explosion of scientific knowledge and historical awareness made it difficult for any religion to assert its own truth claims at the expense of others. And yet reason has been caricatured and deemphasized through the centuries by believers, particularly after the "turn to the will"

became a popular notion in Western thought.

Himes also noted that contemporary Islam's struggles with modernity offer an opportunity to reflect on how Western Christianity has dealt with its experience of post-Enlightenment reason, and commented that the sudden popularity of polemical atheists like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens testifies to continued misunderstandings between faith and reason.

Himes concluded with an image of the intellectual tradition of humanity as a cocktail party where every teacher works as a host, inviting each new and perhaps uncomfortable guest to come and mingle with history's greatest minds and most generous souls. "We have the privilege," he reminded participants, "of helping others to love what we fell in love with ourselves."

Character and Service. The final address was delivered by Christine Wiseman, provost and chief academic officer at Loyola University Chicago. She spoke on "Reason and Faith, Character and Service," addressing ways in which a Catholic university might form character and promote service among its students. She identified personal modeling as the first of these. When faculty and administrators model lives of faith as informed by reason, they create a narrative for students to remember and value. Wiseman identified institutional modeling as a second response, suggesting that the unique role of a Catholic institution is to make it possible for students to search for reality in the sciences but also to search for truth at levels that transcend the personal and look beyond to the "common good."

A third method for navigating the relationship between faith and reason can come from the experience of scholars working for truth in diverse fields such as the liberal arts, Wiseman noted: poetic expressions of the human quest for truth embody the goals of a Catholic university as much as any articulation of reason.

Charles Taylor

The conference was organized by the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture and was sponsored by the East Coast provinces of the Society of Jesus on behalf of administrators, faculty and staff from the 12 East Coast Jesuit universities. "As our institutions continue to wrestle with what makes them unique in the increasingly brand-driven world of higher education," noted the New York, New England and Maryland Jesuit provincials, "we thought that an exploration of faith and reason would offer a perfect forum for reflection and connection across disciplines and institutions."

Intellectual Fault Lines. Peter Steinfels, co-director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture, pointed out in his introduction that although the words "faith and reason" sound as if they go together, like "bread and butter" and "love and marriage," there is serious disagreement in the academic world. He pointed out that a proposal at Harvard three years ago to name a mandatory course "Faith and Reason," was watered down to "Culture and Belief." "It is not too much to say that the pairing of faith and reason, whether in tandem or in opposition, has become a shorthand or code signaling all kinds of intellectual and political fault lines," Steinfels said. "No doubt this is partly a reflection of our stubbornly binary way of conceptualizing all sorts of matters, as in male and female, conservative and liberal, or PC and Mac."

After each major address, a panel of respondents offered further reflections before breakout sessions were held for participants. More information on the conference can be found at http://www.faithandreason2009.org.

Health, Labor Leaders Address Unions

After more than two years of consultations, leaders from Catholic health care, the labor movement and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have agreed on a set of principles designed to ensure a fair process when health care workers decide whether to join a union. A 12-page document laying out the principles, titled *Respecting the Just Rights of Workers: Guidance and Options for Catholic Health Care and Unions*, was released on June 22. "The heart of this unusual consensus is that it's up to workers—not bishops, hospital managers or union leaders—to decide...whether or not to be represented by a union and if so, which union, in the workplace," said Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington and a participant in the consultations. "Because Catholic health care is a ministry, not an industry, how it treats its workers and how organized labor treats Catholic health care are not simply internal matters," the cardinal added. The document calls on unions and employers to respect "each other's mission and legitimacy" and to pledge not to "demean or undermine each other's institutions, leaders, representatives, effectiveness or motives."

Dialogue Sought in Wake of Controversy

In the wake of the controversy involving President Barack Obama's address at the University of Notre Dame's 2009 commencement, some U.S. bishops and Catholic university presidents are preparing for a dialogue aimed at reaching a consensus about speakers on their campuses. The board of directors of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities has said that they would like to see the U.S. bishops revisit their 2004 statement *Catholics in Political Life*, which declared it inappropriate for Catholic institutions to honor or provide a platform to someone who holds positions contrary to the teachings of the church. Two bishops attending the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' spring meeting in San Antonio told The National Catholic Reporter June 17 they also see a need for dialogue with the U.S. Catholic university presidents about this issue, and that all parties should perhaps revisit the bishops' 2004 statement.

Challenges Remain in Muslim Relations

Relations with Muslims have improved significantly in recent years, but problems remain on issues like conversion and freedom of worship, the Vatican's top interreligious dialogue official has said. Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, said one of the biggest challenges is to make sure that the greater openness shown by Muslim leaders—the "elites" involved in dialogue—filters down to the average Muslim. So far, that does not seem to have happened, the cardinal said on June 22. Cardinal Tauran recounted an episode in Jordan that occurred a week before Pope Benedict XVI arrived. A Christian woman fell on a street in Amman and asked passersby for help; two Muslim women on the scene walked away, saying they could not assist an infidel, he said. "I don't think that's the reaction of a good Muslim. But this is the reality on the street. On one hand we have the elites, on the other the masses," Cardinal Tauran said.

From CNS, staff and other sources. Photos by CNS and Janet Sassi/Fordham University.

NEWS BRIEFS

Colleen Scanlon

According to a new report from the U.S. State Department, an estimated 12.3 million people worldwide are currently trapped in some form of human trafficking and **modern-day slavery**. ✦ Nearly 1,200 South Korean priests have signed a petition urging **President Lee Myung-bak** to step down, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News. "We can no longer bear the current situation that is destroying democracy," said the statement from the Catholic Priests' Association for Justice. ✦ In a new study from Northwestern University School of Law, researchers argued that data show the **death penalty does not deter** homicide more than long-term imprisonment. ✦ Palliative care that focuses on the psychological, social and spiritual needs of suffering and dying patients must be part of the nation's **health care reform**, said Colleen Scanlon, the new chairwoman of the Catholic Health Association's board of trustees. ✦ President Barack Obama and Pope Benedict XVI will meet in Rome on July 10, the **Vatican and White House** have announced.

MARGARET SILF

The Power of One

It was a sad sign of a spring that might have been. On the short walk from my home to the center of the small market town where I live, I passed by some open common ground, neatly grassed over and faithfully maintained by our local council. A solitary sapling, recently planted there, had been brutally shattered, and a sign had been pinned to the wreckage by an outraged resident, which read: "Proud of our local community?" Obviously I was not the first to flinch in almost physical pain at the sight of this bent and splintered little tree, hacked down before its life had really begun. An act of mindless vandalism, almost certainly perpetrated by just a handful of people using their power to spoil something for everyone. How easily "one" could bring destruction into what the many are trying to create.

But another story surfaced in my memory—a story I heard from a commuter who uses a toll road daily about a phenomenon he had witnessed at the toll booths. Every morning, he said, there would be very short lines at five of the six toll booths, and a very long line at the sixth. Why would anyone join a long line, he wondered, when there were five much shorter lines available? The answer was the man inside that sixth toll booth. Without fail, he had a friendly, personal greeting for everyone who passed by his booth. "How are you doing today?" "How's the family?" And even, in the case of my informant, the wholly unexpected inquiry: "What happened to your glasses?" My friend explained that even his family had not noticed that he had lost his glasses, but this stranger in the toll booth had not only noticed, but expressed his concern. Such was the power of this "one" that harassed drivers would line up, adding five or ten minutes to their commute, simply to be refreshed by this man's friendly words and authentic kindness. It is easy, it appears, for just one person to bring springs of new life into a world that routine stress has rendered so toxic.

A long time ago, during the recession before last, my own family experienced redundancy, and we, along with millions of others, had to find new ways forward. I still treasure a greeting card we received at that time from a friend in the Czech Republic. It read: "I am only one, but I am one. There is little I can do, but what I can do, I will do."

At the end of the Easter season, we celebrated the memory of how the power and the spirit of one man exploded into the boundless, unstoppable flow of the Holy Spirit, which has energized human hearts and empowered human action ever since. Physicists and experts on chaos theory tell us that when things spiral down into disequilibrium, and it looks as if everything is going into meltdown and annihilation, then a mysterious force which they call a "strange attractor" comes into play, and causes a whole new order to emerge—springing from the old, yet also radically new. I cannot help thinking of Jesus as "the strange attractor" who longs to turn breakdown—both personal and global—into an unimaginable reshaping and revisioning—and who also calls us to add the power of our own energy and creativity to the whirling dance of transformation.

> Just one person can bring new life into a stress-filled world.

The miracle is that the "strange attractor" is not just a concept of theoretical physics. It can surprise you just about anywhere. It can be the catalyst for radical change in situations that seem irremediably hopeless. We meet situations like that every day on our television screens and our neighborhood sidewalks. What can "one" do in the face of such impossible odds?

During World War II, it is reported, a battered contingent of defeated allied prisoners of war was being paraded through a German town. The streets were lined with onlookers, some with triumph on their faces, others with compassion. The prisoners were starving and utterly exhausted, their eyes cast down in despair. A silence fell. Then a woman broke through, an ordinary German housewife, and thrust a loaf of bread into one prisoner's hands before fleeing back to her kitchen. She took the risk of compassionate action. She stepped out of line. But she also started a movement. Gradually others overcame their fears and brought out food for the captives. One woman's action caused thousands to be fed.

Goodness is contagious. The power of one is always more than we can imagine, and "one," multiplied by millions of us and directed toward the greater good of all creation, amounts to a very great deal indeed.

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WHAT THE CHURCH CAN DO FOR COUPLES STRUGGLING WITH INFERTILITY

Science and the Path to Parenthood

BY JULIE IRWIN ZIMMERMAN

Nadya Suleman, the California woman who conceived 14 children through in vitro fertilization, including a set of octuplets born earlier this year, makes an easy target for an anxious public. Suleman seems not to have thought much about how she would support her supersized family either emotionally or financially, and the reaction to her story has ranged from derision and disgust to outright threats. I admit to being aghast myself as the details of her story unfolded, yet I felt some sympathy for Suleman too, because it appeared that she had reached her decisions about childbearing almost entirely on her own.

In this regard she is like most fertility patients, though the majority have at least a spouse with whom to share such difficult decisions. In the past few decades, assisted reproduction has made astonishing advancements, but society at large and the church's teaching in particular have failed to keep up with the pace of technology. As a result, patients make decisions in a moral minefield—with perhaps the value-neutral counsel of a physician—or, in rare cases, after meeting with a mental-health professional, but rarely with the guidance of someone from their own faith community. It is true that the Catholic position on assisted reproduction is clear and well-documented, but in my years of struggling with infertility I found few options or resources for discussing the church's teachings with a real human being or for sharing my pain with others in the same situation. As Catholics we can do better than this. The church has learned how to reach out to others in difficult circumstances and guide them gently toward life-giving decisions. It is time to do the same for those suffering from this heavy burden.

U.S. fertility clinics performed 138,198 cycles of assisted reproduction in 2006, the latest year for which statistics are available. There is no way to tell how many of those are Catholics.

PHOTO: CNS/SANDY HUFFAKER

JULIE IRWIN ZIMMERMAN, *a former reporter at The Chicago Tribune and The Cincinnati Enquirer, is the author of* A Spiritual Companion to Infertility *(ACTA Publications).*

Church Teaching on Assisted Reproduction

By the time these patients reach the office of a reproductive endocrinologist, they have likely been trying to conceive for more than a year, and sometimes much longer than that. Many are concerned about cost (fertility treatment can cost $10,000 per cycle, and many couples need multiple cycles to succeed), but their overriding concern is usually to end the ordeal as quickly as possible. If they are churchgoing Catholics, it is unlikely they have received much support at church. It is the nature of churches to reach out to families with children, and many infertile people find weekly services to be a source of pain rather than comfort. If they know anything about Catholic teaching on assisted reproduction, they probably think that all fertility treatment is forbidden, although that is not exactly the case. Many Catholics I have met do not know that the church has any teaching at all on the subject.

The church's teachings on fertility are best known for what they forbid, but a robust outreach effort can emphasize the opportunities that exist for infertile couples.

The church's official teaching, first outlined in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's instruction *The Gift of Life* (1987), was reiterated in the *Instruction on Certain Bioethical Questions* (*Dignitas Personae*), which was released late last year. The teachings allow for fertility medication to encourage ovulation (a source of many higher-order multiple births) and surgery to correct conditions like varicoceles and endometriosis. They forbid procedures that substitute medical techniques for human intercourse. This includes in vitro fertilization, which removes eggs and sperm from the couple to create an embryo in a petri dish; the embryo which is then transferred to the woman's uterus. According to the instruction, the church opposes it because "it causes a complete separation between procreation and the conjugal act."

By the time Catholics have been to a fertility specialist, it is often too late for church teaching to play a role in their decision-making. The desire for a family is often too strong at this point to be tempered by a document written by Vatican officials. To be involved in the conversation from the start, the church should broach the subject in pre-Cana training, so that couples can start to think about what they would do in case of infertility long before they reach the doctor's office. Helping a couple to discuss the "what-if" before they marry increases the likelihood that a couple will include church teaching in their decision should they ever need fertility assistance.

ON THE WEB
A conversation with Julie Irwin Zimmerman.
americamagazine.org/podcast

Catholic parishes can also look to the Project Rachel model for help in crafting support for couples. Project Rachel is the church's post-abortion ministry, which operates as a network of priests and counselors trained to give spiritual and psychological care to people suffering from the aftermath of an abortion. Project Rachel offers a Web site with links to local resource centers, along with support groups and retreats in some dioceses.

Like those struggling with the aftermath of an abortion, people coping with infertility often prefer to seek help privately. A ministry to them modeled on Project Rachel would allow those at the parish level to refer fertility patients to a knowledgeable diocesan contact, instead of giving priests and family-life ministers one more subject to master. It would also enable peer contacts between couples who are just beginning to confront infertility and veterans who have resolved their infertility in a variety of ways.

Discerning the Best Options

The church's teachings on fertility are best known for what they forbid, but a robust outreach effort can emphasize the opportunities that exist for infertile couples. A growing number of physicians, trained by the Pope Paul VI Institute in Omaha, Neb., treat infertility in harmony with the church's teachings. Referrals to such physicians should be an important part of any effort.

Adoption is not the easy solution that many imagine, but a thorough presentation of the process can dispel many of the misconceptions people have about adoption and expose them to the blessings of this path to parenthood. Other couples may find that by forgoing parenthood, they are able to devote themselves to their marriage, careers, friendships and volunteer work on a level beyond what many parents can manage. Spiritual direction can help couples discern their true call in a way that will nurture them for years to come, reframing infertility as an opportunity for growth rather than merely a problem to overcome.

Catholic leaders have been steadfast and vocal in their opposition to embryonic stem cell research, which relies largely on embryos left over from in vitro fertilization. By engaging couples before they seek fertility treatment, church leaders might convince some of them to pursue other avenues, which would then reduce the number of

embryos created. And for couples who are determined to try in vitro fertilization, some options within the range of medical treatment are preferable to others. For instance, couples can choose to create fewer embryos, which reduces the chances of having unused embryos. They can also reject the option of using donated sperm or eggs, which church teaching likens to adultery because it involves someone outside the marriage in the creation of life.

Finally, the church should strive for more honesty in the documents and teachings it promulgates with respect to infertility. I have studied the issue closely for many years, and I understand and agree with many of the concerns the church has about assisted reproduction. But anyone who knows much about the subject cannot help but be bothered by errors in the official teachings. Even the instruction *Dignitas Personae*, which was released just a few months ago, contains factual inaccuracies. It states that "approximately a third of women who have recourse to artificial procreation succeed in having a baby," when the eventual success rate is roughly 50 to 70 percent for all women, and up to 86 percent for women under 35. Other church documents champion techniques such as gamete or zygote inter-fallopian transfer as morally superior to in vitro fertilization, even though those techniques are rarely used now because they are medically inferior. Such lapses and distortions can make Catholics who pay close attention to this issue mistrustful of the church's teachings as a whole.

These ideas are offered as a starting point for thinking about how the church can better support couples enduring this difficult ordeal. This is a difficult time for parishes and dioceses to be adding to their list of programs. Yet I also know that today a desperate Catholic couple is sitting in a doctor's office receiving a list of their medical options. I want someone—someone they can trust and who has their best interests at heart—to give them their moral options too. A

It's Not All About Eve

Rediscovering the feminine faces in the Bible

BY CHRISTINE SCHENK

People often ask how I can continue to be part of the Catholic Church when its governance and ministerial structures discriminate against women. Even though there are now more women in leadership roles in Catholic institutions than ever before, including female college presidents and diocesan chancellors, canon law restricts church governance to the ordained. No woman can ever serve as a canonical pastor, exercise episcopal leadership, select who may be a pastor or a bishop or elect the pope. And while 80 percent of all paid lay ecclesial ministers in U.S. Catholic parishes are women, their positions can be, and often are, eliminated when a new pastor is appointed.

Episodically, therefore, I find myself asking why I stay in the Catholic Church. The question plagues me especially when I am tired or discouraged. I was 25 when I first began to comprehend the depth and breadth of female exclusion—and I do not mean only exclusion from the priesthood. Women's leadership and witness in our church have been suppressed for millennia. Yet my reasons for remaining a practicing Catholic have only deepened and intensified these past 35 years.

It helps to keep perspective. Until recent centuries, with a few notable exceptions, most of history—not only the Old and New Testaments—was written by men. Female was believed to be a subset of male, so for the most part the activities, thoughts and words of men were recorded for posterity. It should not be too surprising, then, that Lectionary readings in both Protestant and Catholic churches are mainly about male biblical figures. When women's stories from Scripture are included, the selections and attendant preaching often reflect what men think or have thought about women rather than what women themselves thought or did in biblical times.

Which Women's Stories Do We Hear?

Consider, for example, a Lectionary omission in Holy Week. In Matthew's Gospel (26:6-13), just before the passage we read on Palm Sunday in Year A, there is the story of a woman who takes the prophetic leadership role of anointing Jesus' head, much as Samuel once anointed King David. Yet her story is excluded from the Palm Sunday and Wednesday of Holy Week readings, even though Jesus, after rebuking the male disciples for criticizing her generous act, is recorded as having said: "I assure you, wherever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what she did will be spoken of in memory of her."

While Mark's version of the anointing woman's story is part of the Gospel passage for Palm Sunday in Year B, it may be omitted, making it possible for us never to hear about this woman's prophetic gesture that must have been very consoling to Jesus. One can only wonder why Jesus' promise to tell the story "in memory of her" was not taken more seriously. It is hard to imagine a similar directive from Jesus involving a male disciple being deleted or made optional for over 2,000 years.

Unfortunately, the anointing passage we do hear about regularly is the one in which a female forgiven sinner washes and anoints Jesus' feet with her hair (Lk 7:36-50). We hear about this woman on the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, and every year on Thursday of the 24th week in Ordinary Time. Although this story may have the same roots in the oral tradition as the one recounted in Mark and Matthew, the focus is entirely different in the Lucan version and completely obscures the prophetic nature of the woman's action. The selectivity seen in the choice of anointing passages can easily give the impression that women and sin are invariably linked.

Women, Jesus and St. Paul

To educate about women leaders and to model gender balance in Scripture proclamation, the organization FutureChurch launched special international celebrations of the Feast of St. Mary of Magdala, beginning in 1998. Each year nearly 300 such events are held in mid-July. Participants hear presentations by biblical scholars about early women leaders and take part in prayer services at which competently prepared women preach and preside.

One reason the Mary of Magdala celebrations have proved popular is that Catholic women and men are edified to discover that Jesus included women in his Galilean discipleship. Most Catholics mistakenly believe that Jesus called

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only men, although Lk 8:1-3 tells us that Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Susanna and many other women accompanied him and ministered with him in Galilee. This Lucan reading is rarely heard on Sunday, since it is optional on the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time in Year C. These three short verses immediately precede the much longer story of the "woman sinner" who washes and anoints Jesus' feet with her hair at Simon's house (Lk 7:36-50). This leads Ruth Fox, O.S.B., who did much of the research about women in the Lectionary identified in this article, to inquire: "But why? By association with the woman in Lk 7:37, are the women named in Lk 8:1-3 also assumed to be sinful?" Sadly this represents a no-win scenario for accurate understandings about Jesus' female disciples in the current Lectionary. If the optional Lk 8:1-3 reading is not proclaimed, very few Catholics will ever hear that Jesus included women in his closest circle of discipleship. But even if it is included, a pejorative association between women and sin is reinforced.

Many also mistakenly believe that St. Paul was anti-woman. Yet, as Pope Benedict XVI said so well in an address in February 2007, St. Paul worked closely with women leaders like Phoebe, Junia, Lydia and Prisca. Unfortunately, Romans 16, a passage that names 11 women and identifies some of them as deacons, apostles and co-workers, is never proclaimed on a Sunday. Nor are the accounts of women leaders in the Acts of the Apostles (Lydia, Prisca, Tabitha), which are read only on the weekdays of Easter. As a result, most Catholics never hear about these women's important ministry alongside Paul.

Proclaiming Lectionary texts that exclude or distort the witness of women, particularly in a church where all priestly liturgical leadership is male, is a dangerous for our daughters and our sons. Young girls can hardly avoid internalizing the notion that God must have created them less important than their brothers; otherwise, wouldn't they be seeing a female leading worship on Sundays?

And where are the biblical stories of the strong women leaders of salvation history? Couldn't we include the story of Shiprah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives who saved a nation of boy-children, perhaps even Moses, by defying Pharaoh's law to kill all male infants born to the enslaved Hebrews? Currently the Lectionary version of Ex 1:8-22 (Monday of the 15th Week in Ordinary Time, Year I) completely excises these valiant women by skipping the verses that tell their story (15 to 21). Our sons and daughters would also be inspired by the stories of Deborah, a prophet and judge of Israel, and Queen Esther who courageously saved her people from annihilation. Yet neither of these strong women leaders from our Judeo-Christian tradition is included in the Lectionary for Sundays.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MAXSTOCKPHOTO

If all-male liturgical leadership and Sunday Lectionary readings are subtly seeding subordination in our daughters, what is being planted in our sons? When I become discouraged, I remember how high the stakes are and how important it is to stay the course, not only for my own sense of integrity, but for the sake of my nieces and nephews and for their children's children.

After the Synod on the Word

For two years, FutureChurch spearheaded a campaign to "put women back in the biblical picture" at last October's Synod on the Word. For the first time in history Catholic

bishops meeting in a synod "recognized and encouraged" the ministry of women of the Word, discussed the need to restore women's stories to the Lectionary and invited the greatest number of women ever to participate as auditors and biblical experts. Two female synod experts assured us that had it not been for our work, they would not have been invited. It is not an exaggeration to say that synod discussion of women in the Lectionary and the drafting of a proposition addressing "Women and the Ministry of the Word" would never have occurred were it not for the enthusiastic support of people all over the world who joined us in asking that these specialized conversations take place.

ON THE WEB
From our pages, Robert P. Maloney, C.M., on the historical Mary.
americamagazine.org/pages

FutureChurch is now following up with the Synod of Bishops requesting re-examination of the Lectionary to "see if the actual selection and ordering of the readings are truly adequate to the mission of the Church in this historic moment," as recommended by Synod Proposal 16. We are asking church officials to convene a gender-balanced group of biblical scholars and liturgists to decide which women's stories would be most fruitful for prayer, preaching and catechesis if added to the Lectionary. We also want church leaders to restore women like Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2), Lois and Eunice (2 Tim 1:4) Shiprah and Puah (Ex 1:8-22), and Mary of Magdala (Jn 20:11-18) to Lectionary texts from which they have been deleted and to consider adding the stories of other prominent female biblical leaders like Esther, Deborah, Huldah and Judith.

Raising awareness by biblical preaching and proclamation about the inclusive practice of Jesus and St. Paul is a worthy and achievable goal for our church right now. It can bring great benefits for our sons and our daughters because it bears witness to the truth that Jesus' saving power can heal a deeply rooted sexism that distorts the God in whose image both women and men are made.

This is why I stay in the Catholic Church. If people like me leave it to its worst demons, future generations will continue to suffer from the terrible wounds of the past. Worse, we will never transform a well-meaning but flawed worship that witnesses to a subtly sexist God rather than to the God-Beyond-All-Names. For me, leaving rather than confronting the church is definitely not what Jesus would do.

Note: For educational and prayer resources about women in the ministry of Paul, women and the readings of Holy Week and Easter and helps for organizing Mary of Magdala celebrations, visit www.futurechurch.org. A

The Ethics of Energy Choice

On the moral demands of environmental policy

BY WILLIAM H. RAUCKHORST

The next few months will be critical for the development of a new national energy policy in the United States, which is arguably the most important issue on our national agenda. There are two reasons for this. First, large amounts of energy are vital to every facet of our modern lives; second, the environmental impact of energy use is global in scope and has reached a crisis stage. The latter point has been made clear in recent calls for action to address global climate change by many leading scientific organizations, including the National Academies of Science and Engineering.

An important ethical obligation should be a central consideration in the formulation of any new national energy policy. Here I examine the advice being given to the administration in light of this ethical obligation and describe significant new initiatives taken by Christian churches, like "The Catholic Climate Covenant" with its "St. Francis Pledge to Protect Creation and the Poor."

At an Energy Crossroads

We in the United States, and our friends in other industrialized countries, have been traveling down an energy road that is coming to an end. The intensive energy system and lifestyle we have built on fossil fuels (petroleum, natural gas and coal), which serve as a model for the rest of the world, will not "scale up"; there is no way to extend them to developing countries. A consideration of China, India or developing countries in Africa and South America makes this clear.

Per-person energy consumption rates in China are still about one-sixth those in the United States, but let us imag-

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/JOHANNES COMPAAN

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ine they rise to our level. China's catching up alone would require roughly a doubling in world energy production rates. Even the most ardent petroleum-supply advocate would admit that resource limitations do not allow for such a doubling. Additionally, were China to reach our per capita fossil fuel consumption level, the resulting increase in world carbon dioxide emissions would be catastrophic in terms of global climate change.

This inability to "scale up" our current energy system and lifestyle to include the rest of the world points out an important ethical obligation: it is not ethically acceptable that our current energy use requires less-developed countries to remain in poverty; nor is it acceptable that our carbon dioxide emissions bring about global climate change that will be particularly harmful to the poor. The ethical conclusion that follows from this analysis is profound. A new U.S. energy policy must take into account the welfare of all seven billion people on earth.

We need to build an energy system and lifestyle that can be extended to developing countries.

In recent years the rationale for United States energy initiatives has most often been expressed in terms of narrowly defined self-interest. Such an approach is flawed from the start, and the resulting policies have widened the gap between affluent and poor countries. We need to build an energy system and lifestyle that can be extended to developing countries. A new U.S. national energy plan should move us toward an energy system that "scales up." To do anything less is to ignore our responsibilities to the populations of developing countries and to future generations, including our own children and grandchildren.

Elements of a New National Energy Plan

What is the solution? Organizations like the National Academies of Science and Engineering, the National Resources Defense Council and others have advised the new administration primarily to expand energy conservation and to develop renewable energy.

A major energy conservation effort plus the use of renewable energy technologies like wind and solar would "scale up" for use by developing countries. The enormity and sustainability of these energy forms mean that our use does not preclude our neighbor's use. Use of renewable energy also avoids to a great extent the production of the greenhouse gases responsible for climate change. If energy use in the United States and other industrialized countries were based primarily on renewable sources, that system could be adopted by developing countries. Then if China reached a per-person energy consumption rate equal to that of the United States, it would not pose catastrophic environmental problems.

In a lecture at Miami University this year, Thomas Friedman, the New York Times columnist, addressed the energy and environment topics he covers in his new book, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded*. He likened the folly of continuing down our current energy path to pouring money into typewriter research and development after society had entered the computer era.

A major change of direction is now required because expansion of the status quo is both unsustainable and unethical. The scientific community's advice to wean the nation off fossil fuels and move it onto renewable energy sources would, of course, satisfy both problems.

What Faith Communities Can Do

"Our religious communities are deeply important...almost the only institutions left in our society that posit some goal other than accumulation for our existence here on this planet," writes Bill McKibben in *God and the Environmental Crisis*. A prominent American environmentalist, McKibben believes that religious communities have an important role to play in societal energy and environmental matters and in the development of a national energy plan. The role of churches and religious organizations follows from the ethical nature of energy and environment stewardship.

Religious organizations have long recognized the moral issues associated with food; "feeding the hungry" is a corporal work of mercy in the Christian tradition. Local congregations and regional and national organizations are taking part in a variety of efforts to address global climate change. These include educational activities to increase awareness of the problem, concrete steps to reduce consumption of fossil fuels in churches and their institutions, and development of a "Caring for God's Creation" element within the liturgy.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and other organizations, like California Interfaith Power and Light, have sponsored a series of meetings focused on global climate change that have given birth to an impressive nationwide program of activities.

In particular, the Catholic Coalition for Climate Change, established in 2006 under the auspices of the U.S.C.C.B., announced in April "The Catholic Climate Covenant" and "The St. Francis Pledge to Protect Creation and the Poor." The covenant and pledge bring the Catholic social justice tradition to bear on the current energy and environmental crisis. In making the pledge, dioceses, parishes and other

organizations will promise to:

- pray and reflect on the duty to care for God's creation and protect the poor and vulnerable;
- learn about and educate others on the reality of climate change and its moral dimensions;
- assess their participation in contributing to climate change;
- act to change their choices and behaviors contributing to climate change;
- advocate Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they have impact on the poor and vulnerable.

At the international level, Pope Benedict XVI has shown leadership in addressing energy and environmental issues: "Today the great gift of God's Creation is exposed to serious dangers and lifestyles which can degrade it. Environmental pollution is making particularly unsustainable the lives of the poor of the world.... We must pledge ourselves to take care of creation and to share its resources in solidarity" (Statement for the World Day of Peace, January 2008).

The Vatican has also completed an installation of 2,400 solar panels atop the Paul VI Audience Hall. These provide electricity to the hall and surrounding buildings; any excess feeds the electrical grid. Earlier, the Vatican cut energy consumption in St. Peter's Basilica by 40 percent, principally by upgrading the entire lighting system. Such leadership could motivate other churches and religious groups to reduce their own carbon footprint.

Increasingly, religious activism on energy and environment is grounded in serious scholarship at the interface of religion and ecology. In a lead article in Reflections (Spring 2007), the journal of Yale Divinity School, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim wrote: "A many-faceted alliance of religion and ecology along with a new global ethics is awakening around the planet.... This is a new moment for the world's religions, and they have a vital role to play in the emergence of a more comprehensive environmental ethics."

A new U.S. national energy plan should move us toward a future energy system that is sustainable and "scales up." It could be adopted by developing countries. Such a plan, based on a noble vision and purpose, would also serve as a unifying cause, which is sorely needed today in the United States and throughout the world. Concrete initiatives like "The Catholic Climate Covenant" and "The St. Francis Pledge to Protect Creation and the Poor" enjoin the churches to play an important role in education; they also encourage the implementation of a national energy policy based on concern for others throughout the world. A

More Than a Desk Job

The spirituality of administration

BY ANN M. GARRIDO

St. Paul's first letter to the Christians of Corinth describes the various gifts God has given members of the church to serve the reign of God in the world. Paul lists the gifts of prophecy, teaching, healing, working of mighty deeds, speaking in tongues, apostleship and assistance (1 Cor 12:27-28). The gift of administration, hidden toward the end of the litany, is a curious inclusion. Even many of those who serve as administrators in institutions—ecclesial and otherwise—find it so.

As one who has worked as an administrator in Catholic higher education for almost a decade, I am conscious of the ways that my colleagues and I in the larger sphere of ministry frequently devalue, even disdain administrative tasks. "Another meeting," we gripe, "another report, another spreadsheet." Administration is perceived as draining our best energies and taking us away from the very teaching, healing and assisting that we entered ministry to do. "I don't know why we had to study so much Greek in seminary," a pastor recently told me, "when what I really needed was 'legalese' and a specialization in furnace maintenance." Friends who are administrators in the secular sphere share a common concern. "I went to dental school with the intention of working one-on-one with patients, offering them top quality care and attention," my dentist recently admitted, "but much of my day is spent dealing with personnel issues and insurance claims."

But there is another way of thinking about our work that challenges the poor reputation of administration as something that sucks the light and life out of good people. Why not reconceive administration as a potential spiritual pathway by which good people can become better people, distinguished by a certain translucence and vitality that extends beyond themselves and into the institutions they serve? I think that administration, to put it in theological language, can be a "praxis," an activity with the potential to transform not only the lives of others, but oneself in the process.

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There are many ways of defining the term. One can say that spirituality is the particular way in which God works out our salvation in this world, or that it is the particular way in which God brings us into the fullness of light and life for which we are intended. If we speak of a Christian spirituality, we mean that Jesus Christ plays an integral, central role in our salvation. If we speak of a marital spirituality, we mean that it is through our experience of being married that God intends to make us into the people we are meant to be. And if we speak of the spirituality of the administrator, we will want to ask the key question, "How is the ministry of administration a way through which God is transforming me into the person God dreams me to be?"

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, to receive a vocation or a call from God is always an invitation to movement. In Genesis, the first words God speaks to Abraham are "Come out" (Gn 12:1). In John, the Good Shepherd "calls his own by name and leads them out" (Jn 10:3). Calls impel us "out" of ourselves to something more, something beyond. As Margaret, a character in Gail Godwin's novel *Evensong*, points out, "Something is your vocation if it keeps making more of you." What can administration call us to if we allow it? What is the "more" that it can make of us? Consider the following four possibilities.

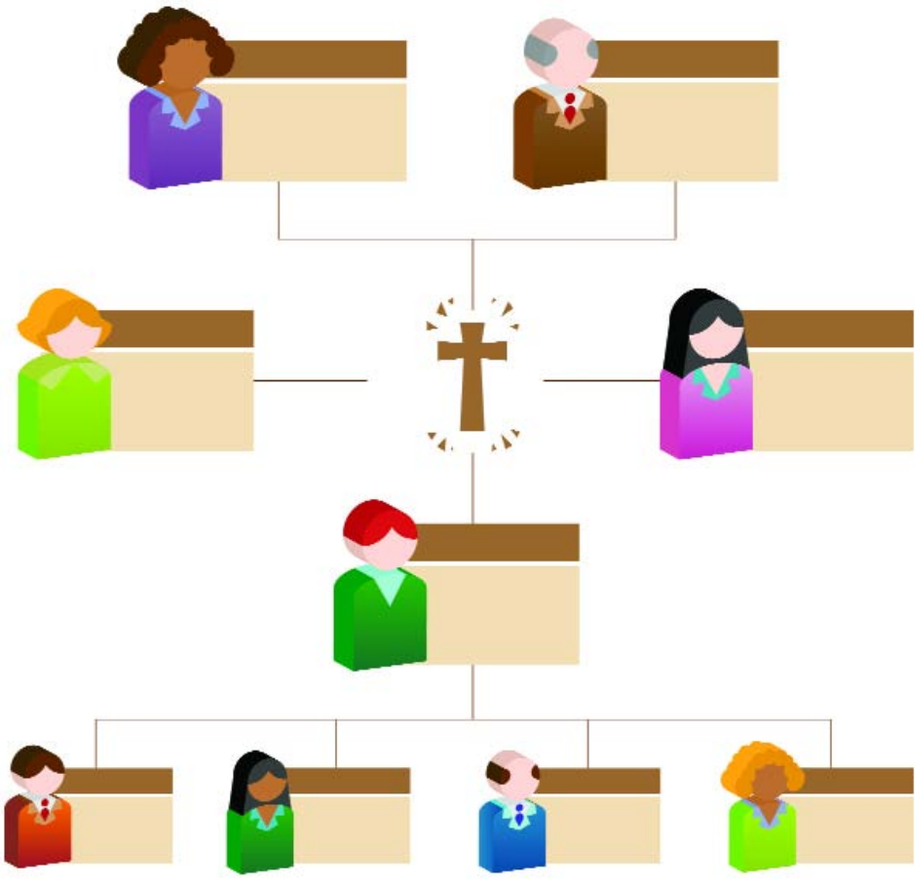
A Call to Greatness of Vision

Some jobs invite us to do one thing and to do it well; we are only responsible for our own piece of the puzzle and need not worry about the rest. That is usually the administrator's job. Administrators must develop a vision of the whole, an understanding of how all the parts fit together and work together. This is an intellectual exercise that stretches the brain, but it can also be a spiritual exercise that stretches the heart, developing one's capacity for a different kind of love. Administration cultivates a desire for the common good, for the flourishing of all. It does not pit one department against another. It does not thrive on increasing competition but on enabling collaboration, on seeing the body function as a body. Administrators are called to strive for the "big picture" and to help others to strive for this as well. To the degree that they are able to hold onto and carry this big picture,

administrators image something of God who holds onto and carries the biggest picture of all. They share in something of God's grand vision. They experience something of how God sees and loves.

A Call to Love Blindly

Since so many administrative duties take place behind the scenes, administrators often do not have a great deal of interaction with those their institutions intend to serve.



Whereas the teacher or pastoral minister is able to get to know particular students or parishioners by name and develop affection for them, the administrator oftentimes knows and loves only from a distance. One of the greatest poverties of administration can be knowing people only through a computer screen. If looked at from another angle, however, we could say administration cultivates the Gospel virtue of "agape"—a sort of disinterested love, not based on personal affection. Instead of being uninterested, it is disinterested in the sense that one's own self- interest and emotional gratification are not provided by the other. In the 12th century, the Jewish philosopher Maimonides noted that one of the highest levels of generosity is attained when one gives to those who do not even know the giver. Administration encourages the practice of giving of oneself freely and abundantly without always knowing what good is being done.

A Call to Courage

Administration is often a very humbling task. The work asks us to tackle issues that we do not quite know how to handle, issues that take us far beyond our comfort zones. It is good to admit these things honestly rather than pretend we always know what to do. At the same time, the virtue of humility must find its complement in the virtue of courage or fortitude. No, we do not know everything we wish we knew. No, we are not perfect. No, we do not feel worthy to make recommendations that could affect others' lives. But, with due humility, we also have to act. We have to ask difficult questions. We have to make decisions. We have to offer challenging feedback. Sometimes we even have to write negative evaluations and let the one we have evaluated know this face-to-face. We struggle to cultivate a "response-ability" to match our responsibility.

I often find myself, as an administrator, in situations with students and colleagues that I would very much prefer to avoid. I know that I do not have the wisdom or experience that I should have to be dealing with the issues at hand; but nevertheless there they are, and here I am. I have learned from experience that no matter how badly I might botch things up through direct confrontation, it will be better than how badly I would botch things up by avoiding it. Often this is not much consolation. At such times I must rely not on my own inner resources but on the grace of the role itself. I remember that someone has asked me to serve in this capacity and appointed me to carry out the task. There may be someone better out there, but that person is not here right now, and the work still needs to be done. I have to trust that the gap between "me" and "what the role requires" will be filled by the Holy Spirit.

A Call to Embrace 'Death'

To say that administration invites us to "embrace death" can sound a bit melodramatic. Opportunities for physical

ART: SHUTTERSTOCK/JOHN T TAKAI/STEPHANIE PATCLIFFE

martyrdom in the line of duty are very rare. Yet as one of my former bosses commented, "In administration, you die a thousand deaths for the good of the whole." Administrators experience a "death" of the ego for example, when they come to a new awareness of their own shortcomings and limitations. They are called to "die to control" with the realization that the institution they serve has a life of its own, in which administrators can participate but can never completely manage. There is the "death of productivity," when they must give up something else that they had hoped to accomplish to deal with any one of a hundred mundane crises. Much of the ministry of administration is in "the interruption."

Each of these "deaths" could be skirted and ignored or greeted and welcomed. In every Christian vocation, one finds an aspect of the paschal mystery. It is inevitable. We could walk another road, but then we would simply face other struggles. It is precisely through embracing the mystery and walking through it that our spiritual journey becomes salvific. We open ourselves up to transformation.

In the Christian tradition, we remember that death never has the last word. In the midst of letting go and "dying," the strange gift of hope is born. Not the same as optimism (a sense that everything is going to be all right), hope is more a peculiar strength that gives one the energy to get up and keep going even when one is not sure that everything is going to be all right. St. Thomas Aquinas defined hope as a way of living that consistently "leans on God"—a particular way of being in relationship with God. It means depending on God in a radical way for not just the peripherals or niceties of life but truly for one's daily bread, that is, whatever one needs to make it through the day. The experience of administration teaches over time that when all else fails, God still does not.

Administration as a call from God and the church has the potential to make more out of us. It makes us more whole, more humble, more courageous. It expands our vision and our capacity to love. It marks on us the pattern of Christ, moving through death to new hope. If we believe in the future of the church and society, the work we undertake is absolutely essential. It is essential for the institutions in which we serve. It is essential for the people of God as a whole. It may even be essential for us and the working out of our own salvation. Administration can be a great spiritual adventure. A

Looking Back In Gratitude

A conversation with Daniel Berrigan

BY GEORGE M. ANDERSON

"What are you most grateful for as you look back over your long life?" I asked Daniel Berrigan, S.J., who is 88. We were sitting last December in his light-filled living room at the Jesuit residence in Manhattan where he has lived since 1975. He answered immediately: "My Jesuit vocation." Any regrets? I asked. "I could have done sooner the things I did, like Catonsville," he replied. That historic act of burning draft files took place in the parking lot of a U.S. Selective Service Office in Catonsville, outside Baltimore, Md., on May 17, 1968. It was one of the earliest and most dramatic of several demonstrations for peace in which Berrigan took part over the years. With him on that day were eight other people, including his brother, Philip, who was a veteran and a Josephite priest; they stood trial that October, the group known as the Catonsville Nine. While free on bail awaiting trial, the two Berrigans spoke at St. Ignatius Church near the Baltimore jail. I had entered the Jesuit novitiate in Wernersville, Pa., that year, and the novice master drove down with me to hear their powerful presentation.

Daniel Berrigan at his Jesuit residence in New York

PHOTO: CNS/TODD PITT

In burning the draft files, the Catonsville Nine used napalm, the gelatinous flammable substance that was then burning the flesh of Vietnamese women, men and children during the Vietnam War. "It was Philip who came up with the idea," Berrigan said. "In the military section of the Georgetown University library, a friend found a copy of the Green Beret manual with instructions for making napalm from soap chips and kerosene." Before the stunned eyes of Selective Service employees, several of the group lifted the files from their drawer marked A1 and carried them out to the parking lot, because, said Berrigan, "we didn't want to endanger anyone in the office."

An Emerging Poet

Nothing in Dan Berrigan's early life suggested the dramatic turn his life would take in later years. Thoughts of a religious vocation came early as he grew up in New York State. He mentioned his fascination with a four-volume set of his father's books called *Pioneer Priests of North America* that included accounts of Jesuit missionaries like St. Isaac Jogues. As his senior year in high school approached, a close childhood friend, Jack St. George, who had already decided on religious life, asked him, "When are you going to make

GEORGE M. ANDERSON, S.J., *is an associate editor of* ***America****.*

up your mind?" They made a bargain: each would write to four religious congregations for information. "Some replied with nice brochures that showed tennis courts and swimming pools," Berrigan said, "but the Jesuits sent an unattractive leaflet, no pictures and no come-on language, just a brief description of the training, called 'The Making of a Jesuit.'" Both applied to the Jesuits and entered the novitiate on the same day, Aug. 14, 1939. Jack went on to a career at Vatican Radio, and Dan eventually began teaching in Jesuit high schools.

Writing also became an important and continuing part of Berrigan's work. His activity as a poet is less well known than his work as a peace activist, yet poetry has played a distinctive part in his life. His first poem appeared in **America** in the early 1940s, while Berrigan was a college student at St. Andrew-on-Hudson, the Jesuit seminary near Poughkeepsie, N.Y. "I was very proud of that," he told me.

'I have always made it clear that I am against everything from war to abortion to euthanasia. I have avoided being a single-issue person.'

On my return to America House after the interview, I looked up the poem in the June 13, 1942, issue; it is called "Storm-Song," an ode to the Virgin Mary. A decade or so later, an editor at Macmillan who had heard about Berrigan's poetry asked him for a collection of his poems. He told Berrigan that he would give it to the "toughest reader" at Macmillan; and if the report was good, "we'll publish it." That reader turned out to be Marianne Moore, a highly regarded poet, who gave the manuscript a glowing report. It led to the publication in 1953 of Berrigan's first book of poetry, *Time Without Number*, which won the Lamont Poetry Prize in 1957.

A photograph from that period shows Dan Berrigan as a young priest with members of the Catholic Poetry Society. It was taken at the Lotos Club in Manhattan, when Sister Mary Madaleva, a popular educator and poet at St. Mary's College in Indiana, received an award from Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York. Since then, Berrigan observed, some form of writing has been part of his life. "It's a daily exercise," he said, often in diary form. For the last three decades, he has studied and written about the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament); Eerdmans has published several of the resulting works.

Berrigan wrote a more autobiographical book, *Lights on in the House of the Dead* (1974), while in federal prison in Danbury, Conn. for his part in the Catonsville Nine action. He smuggled his handwritten pages out of the prison sheet by sheet. By then, Berrigan was a figure well known to the press; consequently the prison officials were "very chary about anything I might be writing," he explained. "I had to write very small and then wait for a visitor who could smuggle the pages out." When visitors came, he was allowed to embrace them, which made it possible for him to press a few pages into their hands unobserved. They passed the pages on to Jesuit friends, who sent them to Doubleday, his publisher.

Berrigan had been writing even as F.B.I. agents pursued him, after he went underground in 1970 and before his eventual capture and subsequent incarceration at Danbury. "I knew I would be apprehended eventually, but I wanted to draw attention for as long as possible to the Vietnam War, and to Nixon's ordering military action in Cambodia," said Berrigan. For several months Robert Coles, a Harvard professor and personal friend, put Berrigan up in his home. Together they wrote *The Dark Night of Resistance*. Two F.B.I. agents attempting to disguise themselves as birders finally caught up with Berrigan, however, when he was staying in the home on Block Island, R.I., of the social activist and lay theologian William Stringfellow. "One day, Bill looked out the window and saw two men with binoculars acting as if they were bird watchers," said Berrigan, "but since the weather was stormy, that seemed strange. 'I think something's up,' Bill said, and sure enough they knocked on the door." They took Berrigan back to Providence by ferry; the media, already alerted, were waiting at the pier. Berrigan showed me a poster in his apartment made from a photo taken at that moment. Smiling broadly, he was in handcuffs between two burly F.B.I. agents as they escorted him off the ferry. A reminder of Block Island lies on his living room floor: a dozen curiously shaped stones from the beach there.

Steps Toward Pacifism

Berrigan described his first meeting with Dorothy Day in the 1940s, while he was teaching at Jesuit schools in New York. "I'd bring students over to the Catholic Worker," he said, especially for the Friday night "clarification of thought" meetings when various speakers gave talks. In the 1950s, after Berrigan's ordination and while he was teaching at Brooklyn Preparatory School, Dorothy Day sent him a young man who sought instruction in the Catholic faith; he was a pacifist. "It was Dorothy who got me thinking about the issue of war," Berrigan told me. "She made me thoughtful about things I hadn't really considered," including the way in which the United States had conducted the war in

Europe. Then he read an article by the Jesuit moral theologian John Ford, in the quarterly periodical Theological Studies in 1944, about the morality of saturation bombing—the kind of bombing that had reduced the German city of Dresden to ashes. Reading that, Berrigan said, was the first time he had come across an examination of a World War II issue from a wider moral perspective.

Much later, while on sabbatical in Paris in 1963 from a teaching position at LeMoyne College, Berrigan noted the despair of French Jesuits over the situation in Indochina. The French forces had left after the 1954 Geneva Accords, and U.S. involvement in Vietnam had continued to increase. With his brother Philip, Dan co-founded the Catholic Peace Fellowship, which helped to organize demonstrations against the U.S. role in Vietnam.

Such activities "were not well received" by his Jesuit superiors, Berrigan said, so he was "eased out of the country." Berrigan spent four months in Latin America, which turned out to be a good change. He sent back reports to the periodical Jesuit Missions about what he saw, including assessments of each country's poverty. Meanwhile, a groundswell of protest at what was seen as Berrigan's forced exile led his superiors to recall him.

"My future seemed dark and I didn't know how it would all end," said Berrigan, emphasizing that he was determined to go on speaking about peace and Christ. His determination led not only to nonviolent actions like the record burning at Catonsville, but to those at the town of King of Prussia in Pennsylvania, where he and other peace activists hammered on nuclear warhead nose cones at the General Electric nuclear missile facility, a symbolic action reminiscent of Isaiah's phrase: "beating swords to plowshares." That action led to further time behind bars for Berrigan.

ON THE WEB
A slide show on the life of Daniel Berrigan, S.J.
americamagazine.org/slideshow

In the 1960s, Dan Berrigan came to know Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and writer at Gethsemane Abbey in Kentucky. On being asked how the initial meeting with Thomas Merton came about, Dan explained that it took place in the early 1960s. "I was teaching at LeMoyne College in New York State. Merton had written an article in The Catholic Worker newspaper about what he saw as the imminent likelihood of nuclear war. I was appalled by the article," he said, "and I wrote to thank him for the piece but also to say it was hard to accept his version of what was taking place in regard to the nuclear threat. Merton wrote back and said, 'Come down and we'll talk about it.'"

"I did go down to the Trappist monastery in Kentucky, and was taken both by his temperament and by his spiritual view of the world. The chemistry was good and our friendship got underway. After that first visit, we had the idea of getting together with some friends there. He didn't use the word resistance, which was not yet in the vocabulary of people who opposed the Vietnam War. He used a phrase like the roots of dissent. He invited 15 people from various denominations and backgrounds for a long weekend, which proved to be very fruitful. All the ones who attended ended up either in jail or dead."

Merton, who was also writing about peace, persuaded James Fox, O.C.S.O., the abbot, to invite Berrigan to give an annual address to the community; Berrigan did so from 1960 until Merton's death in 1968. Around that time, Berrigan worked at Cornell University with a team that directed the various chaplaincies. "We had a big anti-war following among the students," he said. "It was a hard time, but a good time, and I loved it."

After completing a two-year sentence at the Danbury federal prison in 1972, Berrigan celebrated his first Mass at the Catholic Worker house in Manhattan. "The government gave me $50 when I was released," he said, and he presented the money to Dorothy Day for her ministry to poor people. She instructed one of the Workers, "Go to my room and get the bottle of holy water by the bed." Then she dipped the bills in the holy water and "held them up dripping," Berrigan recalled. "Now we can use this," she said. Berrigan laughed as he recounted the story.

For part of Berrigan's two years at Danbury, his brother, Phil, was also a prisoner there and became a valuable personal support. "I was not strong in handling prison" from a health perspective, Berrigan said. Once, during a dental procedure, he came close to death. "The technician inserted a needle into my gum, hit a vein, and I went out." A staff member, alarmed, called for Phil Berrigan to be brought from the prison library right away. "Even though I was semi-conscious, I knew he was near me," Dan told me. An ambulance rushed him to a local hospital. Afterward, Dan asked Philip what had gone through his mind then. "Philip, thinking I was dying, replied, 'Now I have to go it alone.'" That turned out not to be the case.

Throughout most of his life as a Jesuit, Daniel Berrigan has consistently spoken out against violence in all its forms, including abortion. "I have always made it clear," he said, "that I am against everything from war to abortion to euthanasia. I have avoided being a single-issue person."

The community's consistent support for his varied activities over three decades is something else for which Father Berrigan is especially grateful. With considerable understatement, he suggested that the inscription over his grave might read: "It was never dull. Alleluia."

Another reason for an "Alleluia" is the scheduled fall publication of *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings*, edited by John Dear, S.J. A

Faith and Its Contents

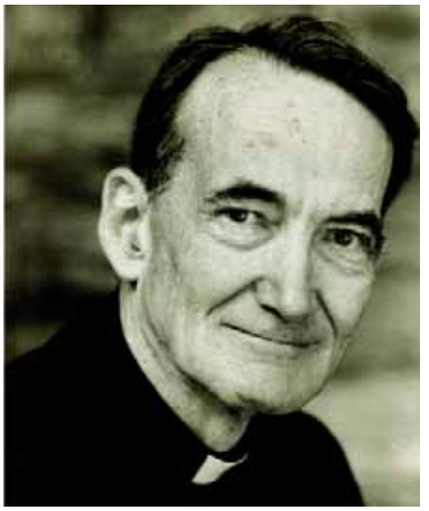
BY AVERY DULLES

An Irish pastor is supposed to have told his congregation that the doctrines of the faith are conundrums devised by God to keep us humble. Some insufficiently instructed Catholics seem to accept this view. They believe in the Trinity, the pope, the seven sacraments, indulgences and possibly guardian angels, for the good, but insufficient, reason that all these tenets seem to be imposed by ecclesiastical authority.

This authoritarian, extrinsicist view of faith can easily breed a sense of emptiness and indifference. Some imagine that it makes little difference what God has revealed so long as we believe it. Devout Christians sometimes say, unconscious of the implied blasphemy: "I'd be just as glad to believe that there are five or ten persons in God as that there are three." Such an attitude reflects a dangerous failure to appreciate the intimate connection between the act of faith and its doctrinal content.

The content of faith, especially in central matters such as the Trinity and the Incarnation, cannot be divorced from faith itself. Faith is not an empty sack that can equally well be filled by anything God chooses to say. The doctrines are articulations of what faith, in its inner reality, already is. They illuminate the inherent structure of any act of faith.

From another point of view, the structure of faith is Christological. The dialogue of God's self-communication and man's acceptance reaches its highest point in the event of Jesus Christ. Every other divine gift or human acceptance is only a reflection



of what God intended to accomplish, and did accomplish, in Christ. For this reason the New Testament can describe Christ as the "author and finisher of faith" (Heb. 12:1). All faith comes from, and tends to, Him.

The total Christ-event may be broken down into three steps. First, in the Incarnation, God shows his loving initiative: He comes in the Spirit and empowers Mary to conceive the Word made flesh. Secondly, Christ as man responds with total generosity, especially in His passion and death. The obedience of the cross might appear to be a victory for evil, but it is the greatest triumph of grace and brings Christ's human existence to its supreme fulfillment. Thus the cross ushers in the third phase, the resurrection, which expresses the mystery of life through death.

The central doctrines of the Incarnation, the cross and the resurrection embody what the Christian community, over the centuries, has found most meaningful in the Christ-event.

In revelation—corresponding to Incarnation—God enlightens us by His Spirit, thus enabling us to conceive and utter His Word. Then in our act of faith we freely respond, adhering to God's Word with fidelity. As we surrender ourselves in love, we already begin to experience the peace that only God can give. Since the life of grace on earth gives an anticipation of the glory that is to come, it corresponds in some way to Christ's risen life. Thus our experience in faith mirrors on a smaller scale the form of Christ's own life, which is its source and exemplar.

What we have said about the Trinity and Christology could be extended, with some distinctions, to the whole range of revealed truth. Theology in our day cannot be content to make up lists of truths that have to be believed, even though they may seem irrelevant or meaningless. Since theology is the study of God as He gives Himself in friendship, the theologian cannot speak about God without also speaking of man. Good theology enriches human life by focusing attention on its heights, its depths, its total meaning and direction. By faithfully performing this task, theology can dispel the illusion that faith is a mere matter of passive conformity with Church decisions. Faith is a living communion with the God of love. A

AMERICA FILE PHOTO

CARDINAL AVERY DULLES, S.J., *died on Dec. 12, 2008, in New York City. This article appeared in* ***America*** *on April 13, 1968, while Father Dulles was a professor of theology at Woodstock College in Woodstock, Md.*

FAITH IN FOCUS

The Limits of Positive Thinking

BY ANNA NUSSBAUM KEATING

Shortly after graduating from the University of Notre Dame in 2006 with a degree in the program of liberal studies, I took a job doing adult education—teaching reading, writing, math and computers skills—at a homeless shelter, where the power of positive thinking was the staff drug of choice.

I knew social workers who stared at $100 bills before going to bed, hoping to attract "abundance" into their lives, rather than going into a more lucrative profession. And I once listened as our staff wellness expert handily dismissed the problem of evil in front of a class of homeless students using the same logic—that is, positive psychology's "law of attraction." This is the belief that positive energy attracts positive energy and negative energy attracts negative energy. So whatever happens to you, good or bad, you have attracted it by your thoughts. In short, if you are rich or famous, keep doing whatever it is you are doing. If you are poor, sick or suffering, you and only you are to blame. Think healthy prosperous thoughts...or else.

Popularized by self-help literature, these ideas that whatever we desire we will have, that it is all in our heads, that we alone control our destinies and that "thoughts become things" have been around in various forms for a long time. But they have recently re-emerged on a large scale with the enormous success of Rhonda Byrne's book and movie by the same name, *The Secret*. The secret, of course, is the law of attraction. Oprah Winfrey swears by it; she has featured it multiple times on her television show and in her magazine, and millions of ordinary Americans are buying in. I have even seen *The Secret* advertised on the outside notice boards of South Bend area churches: "Unity Church of Peace knows *The Secret*, do you?"

So as the wellness expert and devotee of *The Secret* explained to my homeless students how they could vanquish their suffering and end their poverty with the power of positive energy, I wondered, a little shocked, what kind of energy the people of Iraq had been sending out into the ether, thus "attracting" such unrest. I did not allow myself to think about the woman in the front row, who, I knew from a writing assignment, had been raped for the first time at the age of 5. Certainly as a little child she had not attracted this violence. Its occurrence was something I could neither fathom nor wave away.

Of course, certain aspects of the positive-thinking curriculum seemed unremarkable: for instance, making "vision boards" with my homeless students (poster-board collages full of images symbolizing their hopes and dreams). This seemed fun and benign. After all, there is something to be said for visualizing one's own success. Still, giving students the necessary skills to go after the three-story house on the

ART: DAN SALAMIDA

ANNA NUSSBAUM KEATING *writes and teaches in South Bend, Ind.*

white board and suggesting that thinking about that house and getting it are magically interconnected by the power of positive thought are two very different things.

This troubling idea, that affliction is doled out as punishment for one's negative thoughts and that prosperity is a result of thinking positively, prompted me to reflect on my own understanding of suffering, informed at least in part by the writings of Blessed Julian of Norwich.

In *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian offers no causal explanation for suffering. While she acknowledges human sinfulness, she also recognizes an unjust and fallen world in which all people suffer. In Julian's vision of the parable of the lord and the servant, a lord sends his servant on a journey. While traveling, the servant stumbles and falls in a dell. Trapped in the dell, injured and alone, the servant suffers greatly. Instead of being angry at the servant's clumsiness or sin, the lord mysteriously loves the servant more than ever. In this radical accounting, suffering is not simply negative, at least not in its entirety. Rather, it is sometimes the means through which humanity is drawn impossibly closer to God's self.

During my year at the homeless shelter, I was confronted daily with the realities of homelessness, rape, addiction, violence and mental illness. In that space, Julian's approach seemed not only more compassionate, but perhaps more helpful as well. Yes, our attitudes can and do positively improve our lives, but they do not explain suffering or success. All people suffer. We are not our own creations, tidy products of ideology. We are human beings, hopelessly interdependent, ugly and beautiful, both.

I was sitting in my office at the shelter doing paperwork one day when an especially cantankerous student came to my door. She did not want to do her worksheets. She did not want to work with a tutor. She did not want to sit and read. I gave her directions and showed her how to use a computer-typing program, but she came back every few minutes, needing help with the mouse.

It is not that difficult, I told her, looking down at her purple-stained lips and messy side ponytail. Pay attention, I said. She told me that it was hard for her to remember things ever since she was hit by a car while walking along the side of the highway collecting cans. Her body was thrown into a ditch, she told me. "I've had several brain surgeries," she added.

No, I cannot comprehend the suffering of these students. I can only trust that someone might be willing to venture into the dell with them, if only for a moment, neither of them helpless but both of them hoping in a God whose will is our peace. A

In Which I Forgive the River

On the bank where it pours clear over freckled stones,
I want to sit and watch a leaf riding the surface,
a fish patrolling the water road
downstream through sun glint and flash of froth,
on through the river of light
river of water
river of light

And I'll plunge in,
trusting the river which is not trustworthy,
to be carried on its back,
giving up my own motion to look at the unrolling sky,
then turning like a log to stare down
until I or the river
lets go

Already I'm dissolving in the world.
There's my death,
cawing from a leafless branch
and waiting for me to make a move
it wants to notice.

If you crush me against rocks
or force me to breathe like a fish
I forgive you, river. I loved you anyway,
let me say that. If anything could teach me
to forgive what kills me,
it would be you.

CHARLOTTE MUSE

CHARLOTTE MUSE *lives in Menlo Park, Calif., where she teaches poetry and tutors Hispanic children in reading. Her chapbook,* A Story Also Grows, *is forthcoming from Main Street Rag Publishing Company, online. This poem is 2nd runner-up in this year's Foley Poetry Contest.*

IDEAS | DAVID E. NANTAIS

MEETING THE TRINITY

The phenomenon of William Paul Young's 'The Shack'

'A mystery," "beyond comprehension," "impossible to understand fully"—these are some of the phrases Christians use to describe the Holy Trinity, a central tenet of the faith. I once overheard an adult initiation sponsor tell a catechist, "You don't need to worry about the Trinity. Not even priests understand that." The Trinity is an essential doctrine, yet few of us know much about it or its significance to our lives.

The Shack, a bestselling novel by William Paul Young, attempts to put flesh (literally) on the Trinity. God the Father, a k a "Papa," is portrayed as a jolly African-American woman who can bake a mean scone while attending to the affairs of all creation. Jesus is a carpenter who looks like a Middle Eastern version of Bob Vila from "This Old House." The Holy Spirit, a hippie Asian woman named Sarayu, tends a garden and flits in and out of scenes at will. (Either Drew Barrymore or Björk could play her in the movie adaptation.) *The Shack* leads readers to think about how a Trinitarian God relates to humanity, albeit in ways some may find silly or worse.

The book has become both a fascination and an object of contempt to millions of Christians. Opponents claim that literally portraying the Trinity as three persons is heretical; they also dislike the book's message that Jesus looks unfavorably on organized religion and wishes that people could just "get along" despite their differences. Such backlash could contribute to the book's success: "If you condemn it, people will read it." By April 24, 2009, *The Shack* had spent 48 weeks on The New York Times bestseller list, much of it in the number one spot for trade paperbacks. That is an astounding accomplishment for any book, let alone one with a $200 marketing budget. According to the publisher, Windblown Media, over six million copies are in print.

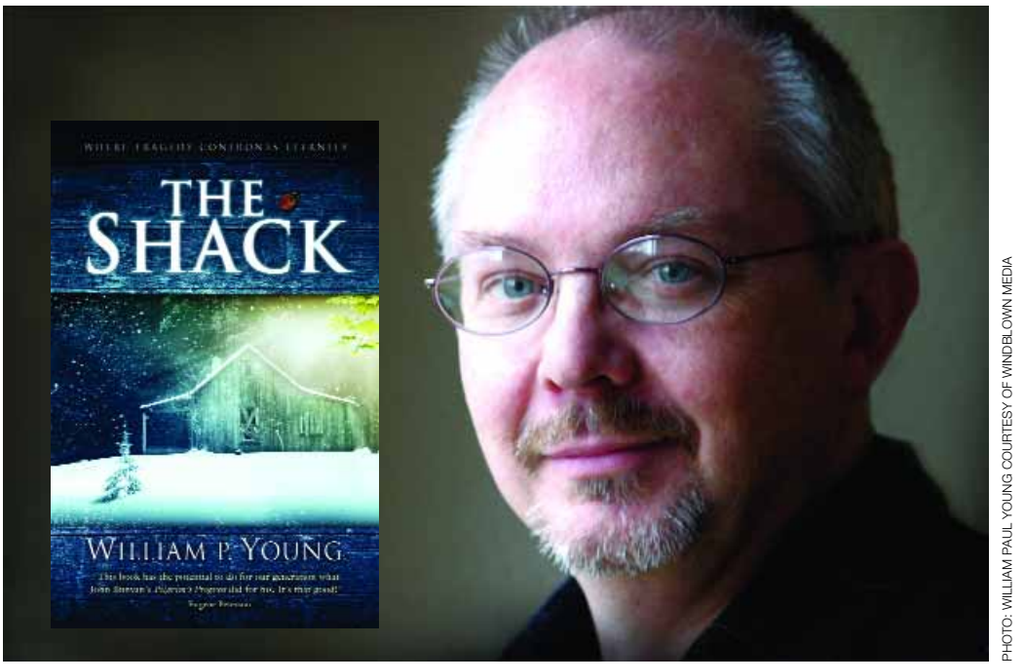


PHOTO: WILLIAM PAUL YOUNG COURTESY OF WINDBLOWN MEDIA

The Great Sadness

The plot is built around a sympathetic character, Mackenzie Allen Phillips (Mack), and his struggle with faith. Mack takes his children on a camping trip in the Northwest that ends disastrously—a serial child-killer abducts Mack's youngest daughter, Missy. After a grueling search, authorities find strong evidence in an abandoned shack indicating that Missy has been murdered. Mack's worst nightmare has come true. A host of painful feelings envelop him, an experience he calls "the Great Sadness." Mack and his family are devastated by the loss of their beloved Missy, but they struggle on. Four years after the murder, Mack receives a mysterious note (presumably from God) that invites him back to the shack where his daughter died. There Mack encounters the three anthropomorphized members of the Trinity, each of whom helps him face his deepest spiritual wounds.

The book's message, one familiar to many Christians, is packaged in a "spiritual but not religious" way. God, especially in the person of Jesus,

eschews organized religion and instead promotes the building of relationships. This may be a breath of fresh air to those brought up with a stifling form of Christianity, but it offends those who find meaning in orthodoxy and structure.

Actually Edifying?

The book raises three edifying themes.

God is interested in our lives. Even before his daughter was murdered, Mack had, at best, lukewarm feelings toward God. His wife's affectionate term for God the Father, "Papa," seemed quaint and foreign to Mack. It is not surprising that Mack, who was abused by his alcoholic father, would find any father figure, including God, to be suspect. If not a lost sheep, Mack is a disoriented one. He stumbles into this experience of God and learns that despite his apathy toward religion and his skepticism about the divine, he is loved by a personal God who is always present to each individual.

We can encounter God in our pain. This may be the primary reason for the popularity of *The Shack*. Theodicy deals with the problem of reconciling a loving, all-powerful God with the suffering in the world. Many people have taken on the problem, from brilliant theologians to ministers to writers of fiction. There is no perfect answer to it, but the best Christian answers usually invite us to envision God suffering our pain, and in that experience to draw us closer to God. The shack where Missy died represents the place in Mack's soul where he is hurt the most, and it is here that God meets him face to face. In the midst of something as senseless as the death of a child, God not only is present, but gives us the courage to move through the pain and emerge, tear-soaked and exhausted perhaps, but with some relief and hope.

Forgiveness is possible. During his encounters with the Trinity, Mack realizes the many ways he has hurt others. Ultimately he is able to ask God for forgiveness. As a result he is able to forgive those who have hurt him, especially his father and the man who murdered Missy. This may seem outrageous or blasphemous to some, but Christians admit no limit to the power of forgiveness, even 70 times seven times.

'Da Vinci Code' or 'Pilgrim's Progress'?

The Shack is like *The Da Vinci Code* in one respect: people either love it or think it heretical. Evangelical Christians seem divided. YouTube videos and articles praising it are as plentiful as those condemning it. One hyperbolic blurb on the book's front cover hails it as a *Pilgrim's Progress* for our generation. *The Shack* is promoted by "The Missy Project," a grass-roots campaign to pass on the book to family and friends. Hundreds of blogs, book clubs and Web sites are now devoted to promoting the book and its message. "The Missy Project" Web site advises fans to leave copies of the book in battered women's shelters, prisons and hospitals, where people might be consoled by the message.

ON THE WEB
Rob Weinert-Kendt reviews the play "Ruined."
americamagazine.org/culture

The Shack is not a brilliant piece of fiction, but its message arrives at the right time. Technology can sever our personal connections with one another, and pharmaceuticals can ease our pain; but *The Shack* shows that cutting oneself off from others and avoiding the pain of a loving, engaged life never leads to human flourishing. The notion that God is primarily about relationships with humanity—and that God is a relationship among three persons (the Trinity)—is both consoling and challenging. Some may argue that there is more to life and to religion than relationships, but as with the Trinity, relationships are central to the Christian tradition.

DAVID E. NANTAIS *is an adjunct instructor of philosophy and religious studies at the University of Detroit Mercy.*

TELEVISION | REGINA NIGRO

BROMANITY

Familial love in 'How I Met Your Mother'

It may seem obvious that a television show called "How I Met Your Mother" is about family, but that familiar theme plays out in an unfamiliar way.

Ted Mosby (Josh Radnor), a happily married man in 2030, is telling his children the story of how he met their mother. But the tale Ted relates through flashback is neither simple nor straightforward. In the pilot episode, in the "future" Ted tells of falling "head over heels in love at first sight" with the pretty newscaster Robin Scherbatsky (Cobie Smulders). It's a storybook romantic moment. But at the episode's end Ted surprises both his children and the audience when he says "and that's how I met...your Aunt Robin."

In response to their bewilderment, Ted offers that he's "getting to it...it's a long story." It is a long story, because in order to tell his children about the formation of their family, he needs to recount the details of his life with his friends—Marshall (Jason Segel),

Marshall's wife, Lily (Alyson Hannigan), Barney (Neil Patrick Harris) and, most recently, Robin—who were and are a family unit in their own right. "Mother" isn't just about Ted's 2030 family but about the importance of his earlier family and the path it places him on, the path that eventually leads him to his children's mother.

The theme of family is coded into the language of the CBS show beyond just its title. Barney, Ted's womanizing "wingman," regularly refers to Ted and Marshall (and, on one occasion, Robin) as his "bros." At their first meeting, he plops down next to Ted in a booth at a bar and tells him, as a big brother would, "Ted, I'm going to show you how to live." In many ways he is a pig, to put it bluntly, and what he hopes to share with Ted is how to "score" with women. But underneath is a real sense of brotherhood with Ted, and also with Marshall. For all his resistance to marriage or fidelity, it is Barney who flies to San Francisco to talk to Lily after she has broken off her engagement to Marshall and convinces her to return; in spite of all his (apparently feigned) protests during their engagement, it is Barney who delivers an impassioned speech about why Lily and Marshall belong together. When Barney hears Ted was in a car accident, he rushes out of a meeting and then gets hit by a bus as he *runs* all the way to the hospital (don't worry: he rebounds nicely). These well-crafted plot points reinforce Barney's "bromanity," his commitment to their family unit, which is a value Ted appreciates and shares.

None of the characters are literally kin, yet they regard one another as family. In a season three episode entitled "Slapsgiving," Lily is irritated that Robin is bringing her new boyfriend, Bob, to their group's first Thanksgiving dinner. For Lily, their first Thanksgiving is a momentous occasion; she considers it significant not simply because it is the first holiday dinner for her and Marshall as a married couple, but because this is the first time they are all celebrating together as a "family." Lily worries that 30 years from now, she will look at photos and say, "There are the four people I love most in the world...and Bob." As unofficial den mother, Lily is protective and territorial, unafraid to offer frank advice or even, quite comically, to sabotage her friends' bad relationships. She and Marshall are both the series' romantic lynchpin and individuals who see their friends as an essential part of their worlds. (One episode dealt with Lily and Marshall confronting life without Ted, who had been their longtime roommate and on whom they have depended for everything from toilet paper to TV-watching companionship.)

Josh Radnor, Neil Patrick Harris and Jason Segel in "How I Met Your Mother"

As illustrated by the episodes "Lucky Penny" and "Right Place, Right Time," Ted believes strongly that every decision we make (from something as simple as choosing to turn left or right to more complex choices like with whom we choose to form relationships) is significant. You'd think Ted could simply say, "I met your mother at _____." But for him, it is the context that makes the story compelling, not just the events that led to their meeting but also those that prepared him to be the man she would want to marry.

Aunt Robin is important because Ted falls madly in love with her on their first date and, in spite of every indication that they could not be less compatible (he dreams of marriage and kids; her dreams revolve around her career), he pursues her doggedly (and charmingly). To realize how deeply he desires a wife and children, he needs to take this turn with Robin. But even though it is a wrong turn, it brings the happiest of consequences. Not only does he realize how much he values marriage; he also brings Robin, a young, ambitious career woman who is new in town, sequestered in Brooklyn with her five dogs, into a group of people who are her first "family" in New York. She quickly changes from being a two-dimensional concept (a sort of "dream girl") to a real person, one who establishes and nurtures bonds with all of Ted's friends, who become her friends.

Ted cannot tell his children the story of his meeting their mother without talking about the life he lived before them, because without that life, they might not ever have existed. If not for the example of enduring love Ted sees in Lily and Marshall, if not for the adventures that Barney forces him to experience, and if not for his failed relationship but solid friendship with Robin, Ted could not have become the man their mother married.

Really the show is just as much "How I Became Your Father" as it is "How I Met Your Mother." As with all deep friendships, the bonds Ted creates provide him with great training in love and responsibility, which are what he will need to win his future wife, and the patience to wait for her.

REGINA NIGRO *is assistant to the literary editor of* ***America****.*

BOOKS | OLGA BONFIGLIO

NOT HOME ALONE

THE MYTH OF AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

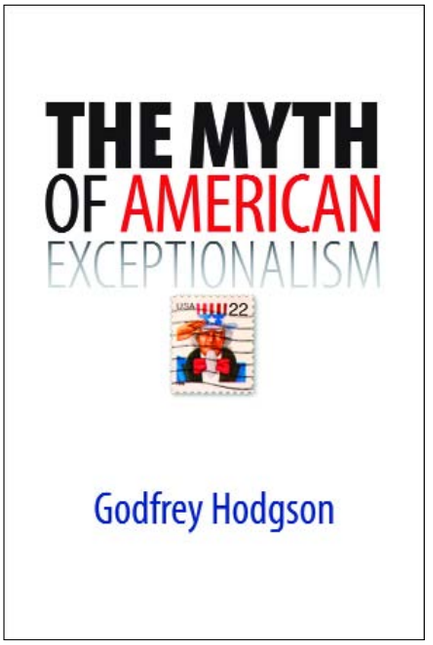
By Godfrey Hodgson
Yale Univ. Press. 240p $26
ISBN 9780300125702

If you are looking for a book that trashes and thrashes the United States, you will not find it here. Instead, Godfrey Hodgson provides readers with a grand tour through American history that offers a friendly but stern hand to explain our sense of exceptionalism in the world, an especially pertinent topic during this period of empire and economic decline.

Hodgson writes this book with some notable credentials. The Briton is a great admirer of Americans because of what we accomplished during World War II. He studied in Philadelphia and served as a correspondent for The London Observer in Washington, D.C. He covered the civil rights movement and made films about Martin Luther King Jr. and Ronald Reagan. He taught at Harvard and Berkeley and has visited all but two states. He prides himself on having spent most of his life trying to understand the history and politics of the United States.

American exceptionalism, he says, is rooted in religion, when colonialists saw themselves as "a chosen people" destined to "fulfill a unique historical destiny." This ideology surfaces from time to time in the book, especially when the nation is in crisis. Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt and George W. Bush all used it because it resonates well with the public and reasserts our identity. President Obama is now using it by "appealing to our better natures," as Lincoln put it.

Our schools have trained us well in exceptionalism, says Hodgson; but what they often miss is the context of international historic processes at work. The American Revolution, for example, borrowed its ideas about liberty and freedom from Europeans,



who had been developing them since the 17th-century British Revolution and the 18th-century Enlightenment.

European political rivalries and struggles also influenced America's development because they brought dispossessed immigrants to our shores. We were exceptional in that we offered the immigrants land they could not get in Europe. These lands, however, became available only after our expulsion of the indigenous peoples who once lived on them. In this we were not exceptional compared with the Europeans, who had built their colonial empires in the same way.

Hodgson continues that the westward movement, made easier by transcontinental railroads, was financed by Europeans, who also invested in our manufacturing, provided us with intellectual property and supplied us with cheap European labor—through immigration. (Here he reveals his own Eurocentrism by failing to acknowledge the contributions of Asian immigrants and African slaves!)

The 20th century reinforced America's exceptionalist belief when we acted as "an international knight errant, riding to the rescue of the victims of oppression and injustice." Much of this ideology came from Wilson, but Roosevelt tapped into it, too, and it inspired us to win two world wars. A good thing, says Hodgson.

The postwar 1950s began a new era of American exceptionalist thought and brought more good. Our victory in war bred a new prosperity, wider participation in politics, greater rights for women and minorities, belief in educational opportunity, mobility in geography and economics and concern for the welfare of others. But it also produced a dark side, our fear of vulnerability to the Soviet Union. Our cold war textbooks taught us a "new militant sense of exceptionalism," with a reworked religious belief that, as the author notes, "the United States had been entrusted by God with a mission of bringing light to a darkling world."

This story continued until the mid-1970s, when something happened to make us seem less exceptional, says Hodgson. International institutions the United States had helped create, like the United Nations, became unpopular with many Americans. Then the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 fomented hubris and we seemed to reject "long-cherished principles." America switched from being exceedingly liberal (the legacy of F.D.R.) to being exceedingly conservative (the legacy of Reagan), which made us drastically exceptional from the rest of the world in terms of imprisoning greater numbers of people; providing less access to health care; sustaining a growing inequality

in distribution of income and wealth; disconnecting the campaign from the deeds done in politics; rejecting assumptions about global warming, international law and respect for international organizations; supporting a standing army of invincible force and superiority.

The rate of child poverty in the United States, 21.9 percent, the highest among the 17 O.E.C.D. countries, makes the United States exceptional, says Hodgson, in that we are unwilling "to pay to take children out of poverty." Additionally, our political system has become more focused on funding and winning elections than encouraging voter participation. Politicians seek money from business and lobbyists to finance the cost of television advertising, which is aimed at wealthier people who vote their best interests, Hodgson says. It is no wonder that unions, citizens groups, consumers and minorities have been left out. Even the Constitution has been abused, the author points out, in part "as a result of the unrestrained ferocity of political conflict" between the polarized conservatives and liberals—who differ very little except in their party affiliations.

A spiking stock market in the 1990s created a "mood of economic triumphalism and a belief in a 'New Economy' that broke all the rules." Americans changed from a people of idealism and generosity to a people who were "harder, more hubristic." Most Americans truly believed that everyone was experiencing a rise in living standards until the bubble burst in 2000—and again in the fall of 2008. Only then did it become obvious that the country had become a debtor nation, in which only the very rich profited.

Since the fall of Communism in 1989, the United States has assumed a new attitude as "the lone superpower," with its 700-plus military bases and a force of supremacy. Consequently, Americans were the last ones to believe that anyone could challenge them, Hodgson argues, until 19 hijackers armed with box cutters poked through our vulnerability.

And that is yet another thing. Americans perceive the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, as an instance where we were exceptionally hated and then dismiss the fact that terrorist attacks were also carried out in Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Tanzania, Bali, Madrid, Casablanca, Istanbul and London.

Hodgson concludes that the United States as it is today is not exceptionally bad but that it is no longer exceptional. Instead, America is just "one great, but imperfect, country among many others."

Some readers may be offended by the book's message. But Hodgson has taken great pains not to minimize America's achievements and to offer analysis about how our exceptionalism has prompted false perceptions of ourselves and a skewing of some of our policies. In fact this book may serve as a sounding board for our national consciousness during this time of crisis. Then, what we do as a nation is really up to us. And that will be the measure of our exceptionalism.

OLGA BONFIGLIO *is a professor at Kalamazoo College in Kalamazoo, Mich., and author of* Heroes of a Different Stripe: How One Town Responded to the War in Iraq.

GEORGE W. HUNT

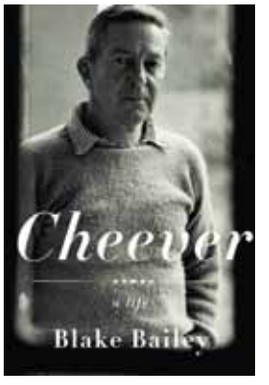
A MAN OF DISGUISES

CHEEVER

A Life

By Blake Bailey
Knopf. 784p $35
ISBN 9781400043941

Almost 30 years ago, I wrote a long literary study of the fiction of John Cheever. In the book's introduction, I forewarned the reader that this effort would concentrate on his writings and not be a biography. Without saying such explicitly, I hinted that any attempt to narrate Cheever's life in any conventional way would be a fool's errand. I had discovered on meeting and corresponding with him that the critic Wilfrid Sheed was correct: for most writers, memory and imagination are separate faculties, but in Cheever's case they were "but one mega-faculty." He was a storyteller by instinct as well as profession, capable of instantly conjuring up a story from a conversation overheard in a restaurant or shaping an elaborate fable from some personal mishap. Conversely, he was delightfully vague in discussing any particulars in his life or work, as if mere "facts" had departed his mind forever, unless in the interim they had been reinvented or embellished, transformed by his imaginative filters into story.



Consequently, in that same introduction I rather disingenuously claimed that I would "welcome" a full-scale biography, while unable to resist this caveat: "My fervent hope, however, is that any prospective biographer would possess a generous sense of humor and a gracious sort of skepticism, for at one with his many endearing charms, Cheever was something of a boyish scamp at heart and an

inveterate teller of tall tales."

Blake Bailey has achieved what I (along with many others) thought well-nigh impossible: an outstanding, exhaustive (but never exhausting), clear-eyed and evenhanded biography of Cheever and a literary triumph in its own right. He also is the editor of the handsome two-volume edition of Cheever's stories and novels (just published by the Library of America), and his ease and familiarity with the fiction is everywhere in evidence. He interweaves seamlessly a narrative of events in Cheever's life with the apt anecdote or quote from a letter or journal entry, allowing Cheever's own remarkable prose with its distinctive wit, vigor, cadence and economic precision to enliven the factual account.

Bailey had access to Cheever's private journal (4,300 mostly single-spaced typewritten pages in 28 notebooks), which he describes accurately as "a monument of tragicomic solipsism," and deftly sorts the wheat (the likely "truth" of the matter) from the chaff (exaggerated boasts or misgivings, bouts of puzzling self-pity). The result is a rich portrait, gracefully limned and shaded with contrasts of light and shadow—in short, a Cheeveresque display.

Bailey remarks that the biblical reminder that the flesh lusteth contrary to the spirit is "surely the major theme of Cheever's work as well as his life." From the start, contrariness is all. Generations of Cheevers prior to his birth in Quincy, Mass., in May 1912 distinguished themselves mainly through eccentricities and alcoholic antics (he will invent a more illustrious Yankee seafaring pedigree). Supersensitive and alienated, he undergoes a miserable childhood, especially so during his teenage years, and yet later he will recreate his feckless father and shabby genteel mother into the hilarious and poignant Leander and Honora Wapshot in his finest novels. Expelled from high school (soon recasting the experience for his first published story, "Expelled"), throughout the 1930s he will shuttle between Boston, New York and the Yaddo art colony, living among leftists and bohemians, and yet will remain apolitical and yearn for bourgeoisie respectability.

In 1941 he enters into one of the most bizarre marriages ever recorded (and yet it lasts until his death in 1982), has three children (each candid about his mercurial behavior and their love-hate relationship with him), moves with his family to the ultra-respectable environs of upper Westchester county and, while there, hones his distinctive storyteller's "voice" as he refashions the ordinary world of suburbia into fable, myth and American archetype.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, he hears critical huzzahs and receives prestigous literary awards, and yet simultaneously spirals downward into hopeless alcoholism and semi-deliberate self-destruction. At death's door in 1975, he dries out, gives up drink forever, completes the novel *Falconer* in 1977 (a tale of fall and redemption) and becomes nationally famous, recapturing his place in the American literary pantheon. At this juncture, his life takes its most startling turn in its twisty evolution: up until then an aggressive womanizer who in his public writings scorned and loathed homosexuals (while his private journals record his repressed ambivalence), he now acts "out" his bisexuality—a development unknown to family and friends (including me) until after his death. His death from cancer in June 1982 captured headlines and countless tributes, and his reputation among the handful of "greats" in American literature seemed secure.

Alas, that was not to be. Perhaps Bailey's superb biography and his editions of Cheever's fiction for the Library of America will revive interest in an extraordinary writer, whose work represents the "hope to celebrate a world that lies spread around us like a bewildering and stupendous dream."

That Cheever's work has suffered from academic and critical neglect for the past 20 years is itself bewildering, if not stupendous. Attention must be paid. As for his life and the man himself, his friend John Updike expressed best the happy, tender memories all who knew him treasure, warts and all, by saying, "For all that, those who knew him can testify, he was a gem of a man, instantly poetic and instinctively magnanimous—one of those rare persons who heightened your sense of human possibilities."

GEORGE W. HUNT, S.J., *former editor in chief of* ***America****, is the author of* John Cheever: The Hobgoblin Company of Love *(Eerdmans, 1983).*

LETTERS

Silver-Tongued

Regarding the online article "Barack Obama and Vatican II," by John W. O'Malley, S.J. Flourishing rhetoric is expected during a political campaign (at least in the United States), but one quickly tires of it. I agreed with very little that President George W. Bush did, but at least he was conservatively consistent. I am not at all sure about President Obama. Cardinal Francis George commented, after his discussion with the president on ethical matters, that it was difficult to converse with him because he kept agreeing with everything the cardinal said—even though this contradicted what he had said during his campaign and had done since becoming president. I would humbly suggest to Father O'Malley that he wait for some time and judge the president not just on his fine rhetoric but on his actions.

RONAN KILGANNON, EREM.DIO.
Kangaroo Valley, Australia

An Allusive Spirit

In "Barack Obama and Vatican II," John W. O'Malley, S.J., claims that the expression "the Spirit of Vatican II" was given "a certain official standing" at the Synod of Bishops in 1985. In fact, the synod addressed the concept once, and then in negative terms, warning, "It is not legitimate to separate the spirit and and the letter of the council." Moreover, the synod also recommended a preliminary version of Pope Benedict's now famous "hermeneutic of continuity," informing Catholics that "the council must be understood in continuity with the great tradition of the church." For an excellent discussion of the synod and other subjects related to the Second Vatican Council, your readers might consult the late Cardinal Avery Dulles's essay "Vatican II: The Myth and the Reality," which appeared in your magazine on Feb. 24, 2003.

RICH LEONARDI
Cincinnati, Ohio

Temptation and Tolerance

Thank you for your excellent editorial on the need for charity in our church debates ("Community of Disciples," 6/22). What you call for is very challenging, because the temptation is to speak in terms of "us" (we, the tolerant) and "them" (those intolerant others).

To cultivate and practice charity amid debate and disagreement is a spiritual, moral, even ascetic practice that we find modeled too rarely in our culture. I agree that it is particularly difficult to be charitable in situations where one's very desire to practice charity and respectful inclusion is deemed grounds for condemnation or exclusion. But might such cases be invitations and challenges to even greater charity in our church and our world?

CHRISTINE FIRER HINZE
New York, N.Y.

More Than O.K.

"Preaching in a Vacuum," by Chris Chatteris, S.J. (5/25), hit a nerve. Bad preaching is perhaps the main reason why many Catholics are loath to find their way to Sunday Mass. In the Diocese of San Jose, for example, there are about 600,000 registered

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THE WORD

On Mission; Creating Unity

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), JULY 12, 2009

Readings: Amos 7:12-15; Ps 85:9-14; Eph 1:3-14; Mk 6:7-13

"Take nothing for the journey" (Mk 6:8)

It happened as I was leading a group on a trip to the Holy Land. Every other person in the group was happily claiming their bags. I waited, eager to see mine come rolling down the conveyer belt. Then the belt stopped. There were no more bags. My heart sank. How would I manage without the changes of clothing, the toiletries and the books that I had so carefully packed? Three days went by before the airline found my suitcase and delivered it to me. Meanwhile others in the group shared with me whatever they had. It was humbling for me to put on others' clothes and to rely on others' generosity. Yet their acts of unselfishness created an instant bond; I was not the only one sharing from my "expertise."

In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples are sent on their first foray in mission. Missionary journeying is never solitary; it is necessarily a communal endeavor. Jesus imparts to them his authority over unclean spirits and sends them out in pairs. He then gives them very specific instructions about what they are to pack—nothing! He does not say to travel lightly. He insists that they take nothing with them except a walking stick and sandals on their feet, just as the fleeing Israelites did at the Exodus (Ex 12:11). As they proclaim liberation they are to take no food, no bag, no money, no change of clothing. They are to go completely empty-handed.

This is a totally different model of mission than one in which the persons sent consider themselves to have a whole cache of "goods" to share with others who have nothing. It is just the reverse. A Christian missionary is to go out needy and vulnerable, so that there can be a mutual exchange of gifts between missionaries and the people to whom they are sent. Missionaries are to put on the clothes of others and eat whatever the local people share, thus becoming one with those with whom they share the good news.

Sharing the Gospel is always a two-way street. The message preached in such an exchange is that of a crucified and risen Christ who makes apparent that God's power works through vulnerability and mutuality. These kinds of exchanges do not take place in an instant. Jesus instructs his disciples to stay in one home so that the relationships can deepen and grow. It is also a warning not to look around for the best accommodations. A missionary is content to share whatever is offered.

Jesus warns his disciples that not all will accept the Gospel message. Wherever there is sustained hostility toward them, the disciples are to "shake the dust" from their feet and move on. Christian missionaries are ready to experience tribulation, but they do not go looking for it.

A thread runs through all three readings today: that divine initiative calls people to participate in the mission. Amos protests that he never belonged to a guild of prophets, nor ever wanted to be a prophet. He was a simple shepherd tending his flocks and his sycamore trees when God called him forth to prophesy. The reading from Ephesians highlights that it is by God's choice that believers, both Jews and Gentiles, belong to God and share the good news. In the Gospel, it is Jesus who summons the Twelve and sends them on mission. Christian missionaries are not self-appointed. The

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

Catholics, but on any given Sunday only about 100,000 can be found in a Catholic church. People are voting with their feet.

Our formation of priests and training in homiletics, as well as in spirituality and theology, needs to be brought up a few notches. Let's not aim for "O.K." preaching, but for the kind that can help to revitalize the community. We will know we have succeeded when the parishes are all full again.

MARY POPE-HANDY
Los Gatos, Calif.

New Vision

Thank you for the beautiful picture of Maurice Denis's "Three Marys" that accompanied Karen Sue Smith's "The Dead Live" (6/11). I loved the painting (the artist is new to me), and Smith's monograph is beyond excellent. Art is such a gift to enable us to relate to the Lord in new and imaginative ways.

ANN M. DESMOND
Toledo, Ohio

call to mission is part and parcel of every Christian's baptismal call. The Twelve symbolize how the whole renewed people of God participates in the mission, bringing healing and restoration to any who will welcome a needy bearer of the good news.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), JULY 19, 2009

Readings: Jer 23:1-6; Ps 23:1-6; Eph 2:13-18; Mk 6:30-34

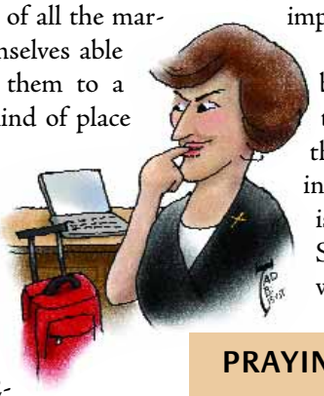
"His heart was moved with compassion for them" (Mk 6:34)

In contemporary ecumenical dialogues, today's second reading is used most frequently to set forth the ideal of the visible oneness for which we long. How do peoples who are separated become united? Today's readings emphasize the role of compassionate leaders in the work of reconciliation. In the New Testament texts the focus is on the person of Christ as the one who accomplishes oneness.

The first reading is an indictment of Israel's leaders, who allowed the people to be "scattered" and "driven away" into exile. The contrast is great between their lack of care for the "flock" and God's complete provision for the people expressed in Psalm 23. The Divine Shepherd leads the "flock" with endless overflowing goodness and kindness to plentiful pasture, abundant food and rest from worry, and accompanies them even in the most frightening times. In the Gospel we see this same tender care embodied in Jesus. He attends to the disciples' need to be replenished after their first missionary journey. At the same time he also attends to the needs of the vast crowd, for whom he has heartfelt compassion.

In a culture where many ministers fall prey to the pressure of responding to nonstop demands 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it may seem that the returning Apostles in today's Gospel are longing for an overdue rest. The Gospel context offers another possible interpretation.

The Apostles have just returned from their first attempts at teaching and expelling evil spirits, and it is likely that their report to Jesus is an enthusiastic retelling of all the marvels they found themselves able to do. Jesus invites them to a deserted place, the kind of place where he would customarily go apart to pray (Mk 1:35) and where one meets face to face both one's temptations and the divine assistance (Mk 1:12-13). Perhaps the disciples were in danger of becoming a bit too enamored of their own abilities to perform wonders. The deserted place will help them experience more deeply the divine compassion that calls them into mission and that is the source of all they are able to do. From their ability to receive divine compassion in their own neediness, they become able to be the compassion of God toward others. Just so, in any work of reconciliation, the ability to experience compassion, that is, to "feel with" the other from the other's point of view, is crucial to moving toward oneness.



The author of Ephesians elaborates how "the dividing wall of enmity" between Jewish Christians ("those who were near") and Gentile Christians (those "who once were far off") is broken down. Christ himself is that peace which brings unity (v. 14). He makes peace by the costly giving of himself that puts enmity to death (v. 15), and finally, he preached peace (v. 16).

For creating unity in our own day, we can emulate this same pattern. We start with contemplative dwelling with the source of our peace, allowing ourselves to be transformed into the very peace we desire. Second, making peace is costly; it demands crossing over dividing walls to listen deeply and with empathy to the "other," and being willing to engage in long processes of dialogue, clarifying where we have common ground and where we yet differ, and praying for the guidance of the Spirit to find the way through the impasses.

One thing that should not be misunderstood in v. 15 is that Jesus never "abolished" the Law. In Mt 5:17, Jesus insists he has not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. Similarly, Paul, when wrestling with questions concerning Jewish believers and Gentile believers in his Letter to the Romans, says, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (3:31).

Eph 2:15 is speaking about the difficult negotiations in which the first Christians engaged in order to find common ground that could lead to unity between Gentile Christians and Law-observant Jewish Christians. The final prong of the process is preaching peace, that is sharing with others the good news of Christ's gift of reconciliation both through our words and actions. Ephesians gives us hope that through arduous work and prayer for unity, we can become one people, created as "one new person" in Christ, reconciled "in one body," having access in one Spirit to the one God.

BARBARA E. REID

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How does self-sufficiency impede the proclamation of the Gospel?
- As you share the Gospel with others, what do you let go and what do you receive?
- Reflect on the divine compassion as the source of mission.
- What "dividing walls" will you cross to build peace?

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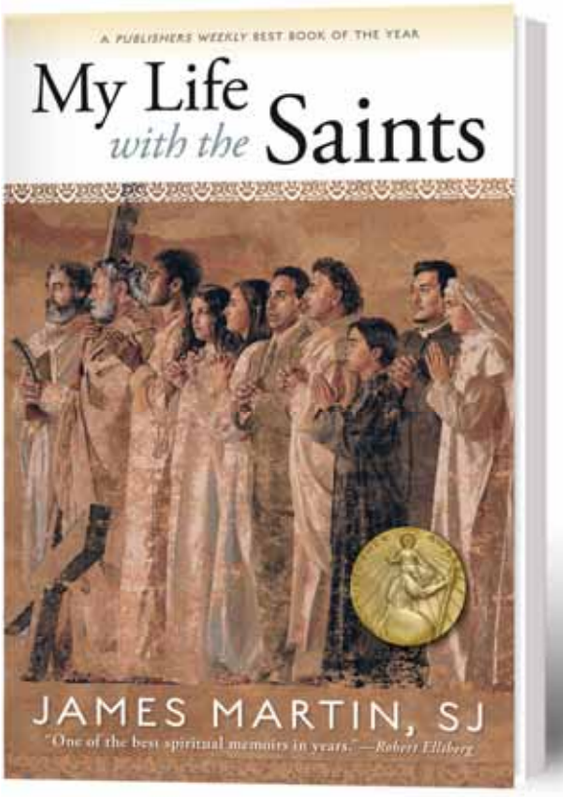

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