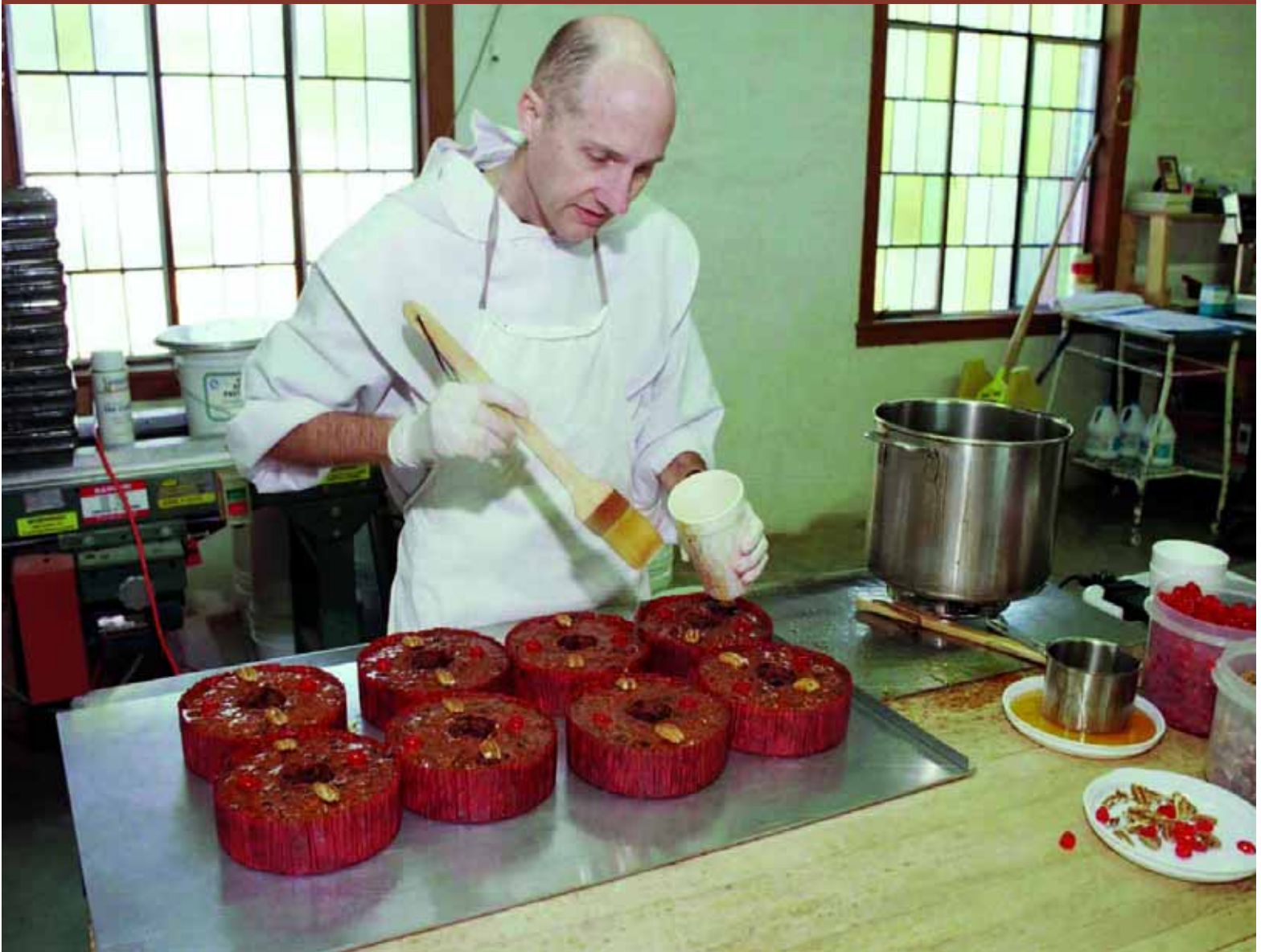


America

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Recession: A Trappist View

MATT NANNERY

Doris Gottemoeller
on the Vatican visitation
of American sisters

OF MANY THINGS

The creation of dictionaries and grammars of languages in the Americas, Asia and India is one of the accomplishments for which Jesuit missionaries of past centuries were known. In order to bring the Gospel to the people, the missionaries first learned the local language. Then, having put it into written form, they could teach it to other missionaries.

Several months ago, at a conference on local churches around the world at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif., I came across a modern variation of this traditional Jesuit enterprise. Simon Nsielanga, a young Jesuit Congolese student there, is now teaching others his own language, Nzadi. This obscure language is spoken in fishing villages along the Kasai River in Congo in the southwestern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Simon is from one of those villages, Bundu.

Father Nsielanga is one of about 4,000 native speakers of Nzadi, and as far as he knows, he is the only Nzadi speaker in the United States except for the 10 students, their teacher and teaching assistant at the University of California in Berkeley who are learning the language in a course entitled Introduction to Field Methods, in the linguistics department.

How did this come about? A friend of Father Simon's from Zambia introduced him to Professor Larry Hyman, and the exciting prospect of studying a language never before studied presented itself. Hyman explained: "There is nothing like the joy of discovering a language from scratch. We are putting Nzadi on the map." Yes, Nzadi has now been added to the Ethnologue, the major database of human languages that currently lists 7,358 languages around the world.

Yet, sad to note, an estimated one-third of these languages are in danger of becoming extinct as children no longer learn the language of their parents. If

these languages are lost before being recorded and studied, then the culture, the wisdom and experience, the ways of thinking and imagining that go with that language will be gone forever.

I asked Simon how the students have been progressing. He found them enthusiastic and challenged by this most unusual opportunity, noting that one difficulty is that Nzadi is a tonal language, in which change of pitch can make a great difference. He admires the energy and intelligence of the students but admits that he needs patience with them in learning the difficult tones.

Where is it all going? Professor Hyman hopes to assemble and publish a lexicon and grammar of Nzadi with the help of the students' reports and papers. Already a lexicon, or dictionary, of 1,023 words has been put together.

Simon has found great personal satisfaction in this classroom opportunity. "I am happy to share this culture with the world, to preserve my culture," he said. After completing his current graduate studies in social ethics, Simon hopes to return to Bundu, learn more about his culture, collect stories and proverbs, and eventually write a history of the Nzadi people.

Aware of dangers to planet earth, we frequently hear today of the loss of plant and animal species. Yet we also read of the discovery of new species. So too, the discovery of a new language or the preservation of a dying language in tapes, videos and books is worth celebrating. If each of the students in this linguistics class were to explore and document another language with the methodology they are learning as they study Nzadi, then 10 endangered languages might be preserved.

Mi épaya matond is the Nzadi expression for giving thanks. Surely this is one way that Professor Hyman and his students express gratitude to their teacher, Father Simon.

PETER SCHINELLER, S.J.

America

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Cover: A Trappist glazes fruitcakes at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit bakery in Conyers, Ga. CNS photo by Michael Alexander, Georgia Bulletin.

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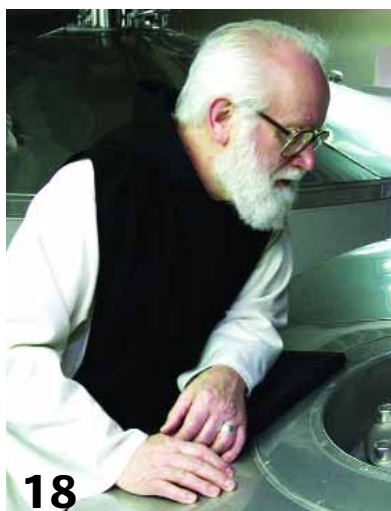
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Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M., right, discusses the Vatican visitation of women religious on our podcast, and from the archives, the editors on Christian witness in war-torn **Rwanda**. Plus, Regina Nigro reviews the television show "V." All at americamagazine.org.



Can't Buy Me Love

Election Day 2009 provided a fix for political junkies still in withdrawal from the electoral highs of 2008. Among the most intriguing story lines of the day was the loss, and near loss, of two wealthy businessmen turned public servants. Michael R. Bloomberg spent more of his own money on his campaign for mayor of New York than any other municipal candidate in history, yet won by only five percentage points. (Late polls had projected him ahead by 18 points.) Governor Jon Corzine of New Jersey outspent his Republican opponent by nearly two to one and still lost. The state's economic malaise played a key role in Mr. Corzine's loss, just as Mr. Bloomberg's controversial decision to override the city's term limits law angered many voters. Yet in both cases the candidates' personal wealth also seemed to work against them. In New York in particular, residents seemed exasperated with a mayor who left no check unsigned in his bid for a third term.

Both Mr. Corzine and Mr. Bloomberg left lucrative jobs in the private sector to enter public service. In many ways their intentions were noble, but their decision to bypass existing financing laws was a serious blow to the campaign regulatory movement. Their bulging war chests intimidated would-be opponents, and their excessive spending too often led to negative campaign advertising. This month's election returns were a heartening reminder that a formidable bank account goes only so far. Money can help put a candidate on a ballot and get face-time on television, but in the end it takes more than money to win the hearts of voters.

The Highest Cost

If the infant mortality rate is an indication of a nation's health, recent statistics should prompt a closer look at whether sufficient protection is given to some of the youngest and most vulnerable people in the United States.

A new study by government researchers ranked the U.S. infant mortality rate (6.9 percent) 30th among those countries studied. Singapore, which ranked first, had the lowest rate, 2.1 percent. Premature births are the greatest contributing factor to the U.S. ranking, the study said. In 2005, the most recent year for which data are available, 12.4 percent of births in the United States were premature.

In every country, premature infants are less likely to survive than full-term infants. More than 540,000 children are born prematurely in the U.S. each year. Therefore, the number of premature births in the United States alone means U.S. statistics are more likely to compare poorly

with other nations. While many factors, such as an increase in the number of Caesarean sections and an increase in multiple births due to in vitro fertilization, contribute to the large number of premature births, far too many occur because mothers lack basic needs.

In the United States many premature infants are born to mothers who have not had access to affordable health care throughout their pregnancy. The number could be cut significantly by ensuring affordable prenatal care and treating illnesses of expectant mothers, particularly non-Hispanic black, American Indian, Alaskan Native and Puerto Rican women, among whom infant mortality rates are highest. Educational programs that teach women about the dangers of drinking alcohol, smoking and using drugs while pregnant also have been shown to decrease these practices and also help prevent premature births. As the fight for the protection of the unborn continues, protecting the well-being of children born too soon, and into poverty and hardship, must also be a goal.

Term Limits in Nicaragua

After overturning term limits, Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega is now able to run for a third term in 2011. In mid-October Nicaragua's supreme court (six of whose justices are supporters of the president's Sandinista party) lifted a constitutional barrier that would have prevented such a step. The move resulted from a petition that Mr. Ortega and a group of over 100 mayors brought to the court. First elected president in 1984, he held office until his party lost in 1990, after which the opposition banned re-election through a clause in the 1995 constitution. Under this provision presidents are disqualified from running consecutively or serving more than two terms. The supreme court ruling permitting Mr. Ortega, who was elected anew in 2006, to run again is expected to stand.

Other controversial term-limit issues in Latin America concern presidents like Venezuela's populist Hugo Chávez, who seek to remain in power as long as they can win elections. Similarly, Bolivia's president and Chávez-ally, Evo Morales, won a referendum in January 2009 allowing him to run for another five-year term. And Ecuador's President Rafael Correa brought about constitutional changes that permit him to hold office for two more four-year terms, until 2017. In Colombia, Álvaro Uribe may seek a third term after having gained a second.

In democratic societies, term limits serve a purpose. They diminish the potential for demagoguery and limit the opportunity to extend time in power for the ruler's sake rather than for the good of the people.

A Simple Remedy

If the U.S. political leadership is serious about confronting the viral doomsday of H1N1, then part of any comprehensive response must be to improve the nation's weak standards for worker sick leave. The United States lags far behind other industrialized nations in the time off allowed workers to recover from illnesses.

After decades of hard-won improvements in labor standards, it comes as a shock to learn that more than 57 million U.S. workers are entitled to no annual sick days at all. A high percentage of those workers are concentrated in service industry jobs, like restaurant and cafeteria work or child day care, where regular contact with the wider public is part of the job. Because of the nation's Dickensian standards for worker sick leave, many low-income workers who cannot afford the economic penalty of a missed day's wage simply go to work no matter how ill they feel. That penny-wise and pound-foolish policy might easily turn an isolated case of H1N1 into a company-wide and perhaps community-wide outbreak.

In *Contagion Nation*, a report released last May, Washington's Center for Economic and Policy Research reviewed 22 economically advanced nations and found that the United States was the only country that did not guarantee workers paid sick leave. There are obvious personal health and financial burdens placed on working Americans by the nation's poor standards for sick leave, but the report suggests that significant economic costs accrue as well to employers who do not offer reasonable time off. "Workers who go to work while sick stay sick longer, lower their productivity as well as that of their coworkers, and can spread their illnesses to coworkers and customers," the report said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention may recommend that workers who are ill refrain from going to work, particularly during flu season, which even in an average year leads to 200,000 hospitalizations and more than 36,000 deaths. But that recommendation is meaningless if it is not backed by government mandates that allow workers some downtime from their employers.

Representative George Miller, the Democrat of California who is chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, introduced the Emergency Influenza Containment Act on Nov. 4. That measure would guarantee five paid sick days for workers sent home by their employers with a contagious illness. This is a rational stop-gap during the current H1N1 crisis, but a comprehensive

review of time-off policy for workers is also warranted. Employer reticence, especially in small firms, and the absence of federal or state standards for sick leave impose increasing hardship on workers and their families.



An astonishing number of Americans are working sick, without any leave. Workers are forced, because of our nation's low standards, to forgo pay or miss necessary family activities: doctor visits, family therapy, teachers' conferences or participation in civic life. A nationally legislated minimum sick leave plan would place an additional burden on small employers. Perhaps support mechanisms for such businesses could be integrated into the policy, but in the long run a broadly applied standard will level the competitive playing field, reduce turnover and improve productivity.

A mandated and comprehensive sick leave policy would also lead to better health for the nation's children, since parents would be able to stay home to care for them. *Contagion Nation* reports that children who are ill recover faster and return to school sooner when their parents care for them than when they are left home alone or, worse, sent into day care, where their infections can spread. A parallel virtuous circle emerges for workers who are better able to care for family elders who may be sick.

From *Rerum Novarum* to *Caritas in Veritate*, the Catholic Church has reminded the state of its obligation to safeguard the interests of workers even as it has resisted the reduction of humanity to a mere cog in the economy. We are more than our jobs; we do not live only by the way we earn our bread. We are mothers and fathers, caregivers and engaged community members, and the right to time off to pursue a fully realized life is a requirement of human dignity. Surely that right extends to time off to allow us to recover from illness—or to help our loved ones do the same—without fear of financial penalty or career recrimination and without being reduced to hat-in-hand petitions to unreasonable employers.

In the United States, respect for family values frequently is observed more in the breach than in everyday reality. Creating a practical and generous baseline for sick leave is one simple way to replace some of the rhetoric with substance at the same time that it offers an eminently reasonable response to the current H1N1 crisis.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

WASHINGTON, D.C.

High Stakes Success on Health Care for U.S.C.C.B.

After a week of high-stakes negotiation and an unprecedented push by U.S. Catholic bishops to involve U.S. Catholic parishioners in a last-minute campaign to keep federal funding for abortion out of the bill, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passed a health care reform package on Nov. 7 by a vote of 220 to 215. The Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962) includes the Stupak-Pitts Amendment, which was supported by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. That measure prohibits the government “public option” plan or any private plan subsidized with federal money that participates in the reform package’s insurance exchanges from offering coverage for abortion procedures, except in the case of rape or incest or when the mother’s life is in danger.

A Senate vote could come any time the Senate majority leader, Harry Reid, Democrat of Nevada, thinks he has 60 votes. Lawmakers appear to be angling to put a reform package on the floor by Christmas.

The Nov. 7 vote was a victory for the Catholic pro-life and national right-to-life community, though less of an achievement than pro-choice advocates are suggesting, since the amendment does not add new restrictions on abortion but continues Hyde Amendment prohibitions on the use of federal money for elective abortion. President Obama appeared to endorse that position in an interview with ABC News on Nov. 9. “I laid out a very simple principle,”

he said, “which is this is a health care bill, not an abortion bill. And we’re not looking to change what is the principle that has been in place for a very long time, which is federal dollars are not used to subsidize abortions.” While Democratic senators were



scrambling to replicate the Stupak Amendment, the president indicated that changes in the amendment’s language were likely. “I want to make sure that the provision that emerges meets that test—that we are not in some way sneaking in funding for abortions, but,

THE VATICAN

Apostolic Constitution Welcomed By Anglican Traditionalists

The Vatican’s plan to ease the absorption of groups of disaffected Anglicans, published on Nov. 9, three weeks after it was announced in Rome and London, upset many involved in ecumenical dialogue, delighted the traditionalists at whom it was aimed and gave canon lawyers much to mull over. The apostolic constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus (Groups of Anglicans)* provides for the creation of a new kind of

jurisdiction known as a personal ordinariate. This “separate but overlapping jurisdiction,” as it was described by the archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, would allow former Anglicans to be full Catholics while preserving many of their liturgical and other traditions.

Anxious to limit the ecumenical fallout, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stressed that this was not an initiative of the Holy See

but a response to many requests over the years from Anglicans who have broken with their church or whose relationship to it has become more and more uncomfortable. By recognizing the “elements of sanctification and of truth” outside the visible confines of the Catholic Church, the constitution explained, it was acknowledging the “forces impelling towards Catholic unity.” Some critics, however, saw the move as giving up on the official Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue process, known as Arcic, which aims at eventually uniting the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion.

The two bodies most identified



on the other hand, that we're not restricting women's insurance choices."

The intensity of the pro-choice backlash to the Stupak Amendment was a surprise to some observers, since the provision merely codified what has been for decades established policy. The

health insurance offered to employees of the federal government, upon which a public option may be modeled, for example, does not include coverage for abortion. Neither do federally funded military or Medicaid plans.

Nonetheless, the pro-choice camp's response to the amendment has been energetic. The president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, Nancy Keenan, said in a statement: "We will hold those lawmakers who sided with the extreme Stupak-Pitts Amendment accountable for abandoning women and capitulating to the most extreme fringe of the anti-choice movement."

Lynn Woolsey, Democrat of California and co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus essentially called on the Internal Revenue Service to investigate the U.S.C.C.B. "The role the bishops played in pushing the Stupak Amendment...was more than mere advocacy.... The I.R.S. is less restrictive about church involvement in efforts to influence legislation than it is about involvement in campaigns and elections. Given the political behavior of

U.S.C.C.B. in this case, maybe it shouldn't be."

U.S. bishops and Catholic pro-life advocates have been accused of jeopardizing health care reform because of their insistence on including prohibitions on federal money for abortion in whatever plan emerged from Congress. But it could just as easily be argued that it was the church's alleged brinkmanship that helped propel a floor vote on health care reform in the first place. That vote would not have happened without Stupak-Pitts clearing the way for moderate and conservative Democrats to support the reform package, and the amendment was the tipping point for Anh Cao, of Louisiana, who became the only Republican member to vote in support of the House health care reform bill.

As the debate moves to the Senate, now it is pro-choice advocates who threaten to stall health care reform if abortion-funding constraints are not weakened in the final proposals to come out of the congressional conference committee.

with the petition to Rome praised the constitution as generous and imaginative. Both the Traditional Anglican Communion, which split from



Not waiting: Episcopal nuns received into the church in Baltimore, Sept. 3

Canterbury in 1991, and the Church of England group Forward in Faith—which has about 1,000 Anglo-Catholic priests as members—praised the flexibility and vision of the apostolic constitution. A TAC statement said each local synod would need to respond; its United Kingdom wing was the first to do so, announcing that its 20 parishes would be seeking communion through a personal ordinarate.

Meanwhile the Rev. Geoffrey Kirk, national secretary of Forward in

Faith, said he thought *Anglicanorum Coetibus* proved to be more generous than had been previously suggested. "Of the 450 parishes I knew would take [the pope's invitation] seriously, I said between 150 and 200 would convert. Now I think it'll be more than 200," he said. The group's chairman, Bishop John Broadhurst, said the Vatican's new home for Anglo-Catholics was what they had sought in vain from Canterbury. "What Rome has done is offer exactly what the Church of England has refused," he said.

A crucial issue for Anglican priests pondering the move will be whether they can be reordained as Catholic priests while being married. The apos-

tolic constitution makes clear that they can do so on a “case-by-case” basis—as happens already—as long as there are no impediments, such as having formerly been a Catholic priest. But in future, the document implies, this derogation from the norm of clerical celibacy will be more restrictive. This leaves a question mark hanging over the “separate houses of formation” provided for in the plan.

Each ordinariate will be headed by a priest or unmarried bishop. Married bishops will have the status of presbyter but will be granted the privileges of retired Catholic bishops, joining bishops’ conferences as nonvoting members and allowed to wear episcopal insignia. The apostolic constitution also allows for former Anglican clergy members to hold down careers not incompatible with their clerical status, a concession that will encourage non-stipendiary Church of England clergy members and others who are wondering how they will survive.

Inevitably, money and property will play a part in deciding whether Anglicans choose to accept Rome’s offer. The ordinariates will need to be self-funding, and departing congregations may not succeed in persuading their local Church of England bishops to allow them to continue to worship in their buildings. Many details remain to be negotiated—a process that in itself opens up new paths in Anglican-Catholic relations.

AUSTEN IVEREIGH *writes for America from London.*

California Bishops Praise Women Religious

California’s bishops issued a statement of appreciation on Oct. 29 for the work and ministry of women

NEWS BRIEFS

A man found driving the car owned by Marguerite Bartz, of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, on Nov. 6 has been **charged in the sister’s murder**. She was found dead in her convent in Navajo, N.M., five days earlier. + The State of Virginia executed the **mass killer John Allen Muhammad** on Nov. 10 despite a call for mercy for the convicted sniper by Bishop Paul S. Loverde of Arlington. + Sister Donna Quinn received a reprimand from the Sinsinawa Dominicans of Wisconsin on Nov. 2 for serving as a **volunteer escort at an abortion clinic** in suburban Chicago. + American deacon Jack Sullivan, 71, of Marshfield, Mass., described during a press conference in London on Nov. 9 how he was **suddenly and inexplicably cured** from a severe spinal condition after he prayed for healing through the intercession of Cardinal John Henry Newman. + Commenting on a wave of kidnapping, rape and assault of undocumented people in southern Mexico, the Rev. José Alejandro Solalinde, director of the Mexican bishops’ migrant ministry, said at a forum on Nov. 3, “The mafias...have now discovered **how to get rich off migrants**.”



Jack Sullivan with Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster

religious in the nation’s most populous state. The statement acknowledged “with profound gratitude the contributions of these women of the Gospel who have lived and served in the Catholic dioceses and archdioceses of California.” The statement was accompanied by a letter from Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles and was sent to communities of women religious across the state. “We are all aware of the special anxieties which surround our women religious these days, and I am writing to offer you my prayers of gratitude and my support for all of your members,” the cardinal wrote. Cardinal Mahony cited the two centuries of ministry the sisters have offered to the people of California. He credited the sisters for establishing schools, hospitals and other facilities.

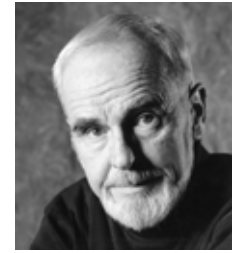
Bishop Urges End to Afghan Conflict

The bishop who heads the Military Diocese of Great Britain has urged the British government to equip adequately the armed forces serving in Afghanistan and to use diplomacy to bring an end to the 8-year-old conflict. Bishop Richard Moth said in a homily during a Remembrance Sunday Mass on Nov. 8 in Westminster Cathedral in London that each day “more names are added to the list of those who have lost their lives.

“While there is no such thing as war without risk, those currently serving deserve all the necessary support and resources they need to fulfill the task they have been given,” the bishop said on the day that Britain honors its war dead.

From CNS and other sources.

JOHN F. KAVANAUGH



Slandering the President

On Oct. 29 Glenn Beck ended his program on Fox TV with the words of Thomas Jefferson: "All tyranny needs to gain a foothold is for people of good conscience to remain silent." Beck himself certainly has not been silent. In lectures, best-selling books, a radio program and his television show, he has warned America of the coming tyranny under a conspiratorial president. Armed with videos and quotations ranging from the mindless and amoral behavior of some members of Acorn to reckless statements made by associates and appointees of President Obama, Beck connects dots to draw a web of radicals who are out to destroy America as the founders intended it.

The exposing of unethical practices or foolish statements as well as reasoned critique of health, economic and international policies are essential to our civil discourse. I, for one, am troubled by the administration's policy in Afghanistan, its reliance on many of the financial wizards who led us into our present mess and its disorganized, sometimes tepid approach to health care reform.

But defamation by innuendo is something else. Glenn Beck and his radio twin, Rush Limbaugh, have since the president's inauguration imputed tyrannical intentions to the man. Whether inflating episodes such as children singing a song about Mr. Obama, claiming that the president is a racist with a "deep-seated hatred of white people and white culture" or characterizing "Obama's America" as

an offspring of Maoism or Nazism, Beck and Limbaugh are stoking a fire of fear and anger against the president of the United States.

If you search the Internet for the phrase "Obama is..." the top six possibilities offered are, "antichrist," "idiot," "racist," "liar," "Hitler," "socialist." A search for "Obama" and "destroying America" yields 719,000 sites.

Obama the destroyer has been a recent theme of Limbaugh. On June 4, Newsmax.com (a news partner of The Washington Times) reported that Rush Limbaugh, on the previous night's news, told Sean Hannity that "like Osama Bin Laden, the president is trying to destroy America." What Limbaugh really said was, "If Al Qaeda wants to demolish the America we know and love, they'd better hurry because Obama is beating them to it." In an "On the Record" interview with Fox's Greta Van Susteren on July 23 and 24, Limbaugh claimed that the president, who is "purposely destroying the economy," wants "as little liberty and freedom as possible" for the American people. He wants to determine who is born and when we die. Bent on remaking the country, the president is allegedly causing joblessness on purpose. After saying that the "greatness of this country's people is under assault," Limbaugh concludes that the president "has contempt for the American people."

As if that were not enough, on Nov. 1 "Fox News Sunday" gave Limbaugh 30 minutes to lob unchallenged assertions that Mr. Obama is an immature

narcissist, an extreme radical intent on destroying the economy.

We have here the suggested embodiment of Glenn Beck's tyrant, a president who wants to destroy America and its economy and to seize total control over our lives. These accusations should not be passed off as the musings of crackpots or satirical entertainers. No matter what the motives behind this demonizing, the act amounts to the highest of slanders. Limbaugh professes how much he loves this country, a Christian country, he insists. But does he realize that the Christian tradition holds calumny to be a serious sin?

An Internet search for 'Obama' and 'destroying America' yields 719,000 sites.

Slander has emerged as a new genre for the Internet. I'm sure I am not the only one receiving "forward it on" e-mails from people alarmed at the coming downfall of our country, often with allusions to Hitler as a precursor to our present president.

Whatever our political leanings or fears for the future may be, let us hope that there is not someone out there who, having been seduced by slanderous innuendo, really thinks Barack Obama is as bad as Bin Laden and as tyrannical as Hitler. It is painful to consider what could happen in the face of such imagined tyranny. And let us pray that such actions are not inspired by John Wilkes Booth or Timothy McVeigh, with their shared motto, "sic semper tyrannis." If a terrible assault on the president should occur, will Christians who advanced the slander of him be contrite? And will those of us who were silent be shamed?

JOHN F. KAVANAUGH, S.J., is a professor of philosophy at St. Louis University in St. Louis, Mo.

PHOTO: CNS/FRANK J. METHE, CLARION HERALD



A march in New Orleans for a prayer service to preserve wetlands, Aug. 17, 2009.

PHOTO: CNS/NANCY WIECHEC



A eucharistic congress at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, Sept. 11, 2009.



HOW THE VATICAN INVESTIGATION
COULD PROVE BENEFICIAL

A Visitor's Guide

BY DORIS GOTTEMOELLER

How do you ascertain the religious motivation, practice and well-being of 60,000 women religious and their congregations across the United States? It is a daunting challenge, but we are about to find out.

By now most readers of *America* are aware that the Vatican has initiated an apostolic visitation of American women religious. Between April and July, Mother Mary Clare Millea, A.S.C.J., the designated visitor, interviewed either in person, over the phone or through correspondence, 244 superiors general of the various congregations. This fall, each congregation received a lengthy questionnaire to be completed by the end of the year. And beginning in January 2010, a cross-section of congregations will be visited by teams of visitors. The final confidential report will be prepared and delivered to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life by mid-2011.

After some initial dismay over what seemed like an investigation prompted by unknown sources for unknown motives, most superiors have resolved to meet the challenge with equanimity and to use the occasion as a growth opportunity for their congregations. No one denies the right of the Vatican congregation to institute a study. Religious congregations are chartered by the church, either by Rome or by diocesan bishops; their rules and constitutions are formally approved; and they are bound by canon law.

To be done well, the investigation will require an enormous commitment of time and attention from hundreds of sisters, perhaps even thousands, as well as from those involved in processing information and from



DORIS GOTTEMOELLER, R.S.M., is the senior vice president for mission integration at Catholic Healthcare Partners in Cincinnati, Ohio. She is also a past president of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

the visiting teams. The following are some reflections motivated by a desire to see this expenditure of resources pay off. It is my belief that the effort will be rewarded if the following four conditions are met.

Sincerity and Candor

First, sisters need to enter into the exercise with sincerity and candor. To draw an analogy from the area of ministry in which I am involved (a large Catholic health care system), a commitment to internal auditing practices and procedures is vital to mission fidelity. Dozens of people—who report directly to the boards of trustees rather than to management—are employed full time in auditing our clinical, financial, organizational and ethical performance. This is in addition to our required external audits, as well as reports to state and federal agencies and regulators and to our bondholders. We do not just say we offer the best quality care, treat our employees justly, pay our bills on time, adhere to the church's ethical and religious directives and so on; we try to prove it daily. It is an imperfect analogy, but it points to the benefit of rigorous self-examination to maintain fidelity to organizational purpose.

In the 40 years since the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council, religious congregations have performed countless self-studies. But these have not necessarily gone to the depth envisioned here. In particular, I am not convinced that we have asked ourselves the following kinds of questions: Have the changes we made borne the intended fruit? Are we holier or more zealous as a result of greater freedom and personal choice? Is our witness evident to the people of God? Or do we simply assume that people understand why we have made the changes we have made? As of this writing, I have not seen the official questionnaire, but my instinct is that the researchers will have found these types of deep questions as difficult to craft as we have.

Sympathetic Understanding

The second condition of a fruitful visitation will be that the investigators and researchers review the information with a sympathetic understanding that the subjects of this visitation are real women, committed to leading lives of uncommon generosity and fidelity in an often hostile or uncomprehending culture. They deserve the respect and gratitude of the church and its leaders, as well as, perhaps, occasional advice and counsel. Further, it will be important for the investigators to avoid unwarranted generalizations. The burden on a major superior of replying to questions on behalf of 3,000 or 4,000 members, located from coast to coast and missioned to a variety of ministries—to say nothing of involving them in meaningful discussions prior to the studies—will be quite different from the burden on a superior with only 30 members who are all geographically close to one another. Also, individual sisters will be invited and encouraged to submit their own responses. Opinions at variance with the answers on the questionnaires may contain valuable insights, but they will have to be understood as individual opinions, not as consensus views.

Other Voices

Third, some way should be found to incorporate the views of people other than religious. In his post-synodal exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (1996), Pope John Paul II described our life as a gift to the whole church: “The consecrated life is *not something isolated and marginal*, but a reality which affects the whole Church” (italics in the original). Thus religious life has an essential public dimension, and the views of the rest of the church are indispensable to a correct understanding of its effectiveness.

This dimension does not seem to be envisioned in the plan that has been laid before us, but it is not too late to incorporate Pope John Paul II's wise insights into the site visits that will ensue in 2010. Could representative focus



Mary Clare Millea, A.S.C.J., Vatican visitor

PHOTO: CNS/COURTESY APOSTLES OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

groups be gathered to respond to carefully crafted questions? What do pastors and parishioners think? What about the students in our schools and colleges, the patients in our hospitals, the residents in our long-term care facilities and the visitors to our social service centers? What about our employees and collaborators in all these ministry sites? If our visibility has so declined that these potential informants have no opinions, or if their opinions are negative, then this is valuable information for all parties. But whether positive or negative or indifferent, there can be no assessment of the vitality of women's religious life without consulting those affected by our ministries. If the study design is not modified to include such input, we can only hope that individuals from all walks of life will spontaneously choose to submit letters to the visitation staff.

Transparency

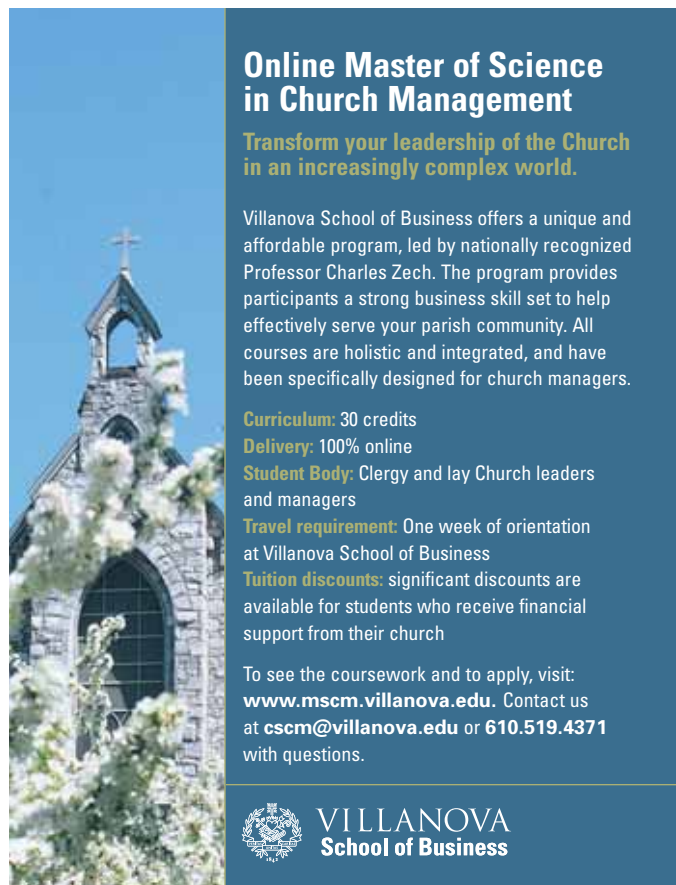
Finally, a large part of the potential value of the visitation will be lost without transparency. The information provided so far indicates that at the end of the process Mother Mary Clare Millea will submit a confidential report to the Vatican. To return to the analogy of the health system audit above, it would be unthinkable—in fact, a total waste of resources—to audit a department or service line and then

withhold the information from those most responsible for that part of the organization. How can the organization improve if it is not informed about what has been learned? Not to disclose the findings is to suggest that there is another agenda—some sort of sanction, for example, against a congregation or group of congregations expected to be found deficient—that underlies the study. For any new Roman instruction to be received respectfully by women religious, we deserve to see the information on which it is based. Our own investment of time and money into this visitation deserves no less.

In *Vita Consecrata* Pope John Paul II wrote: “During these years of renewal, the consecrated life, like other ways of life in the church, has gone through a difficult and trying period. It has been a period full of hopes, new experiments and proposals aimed at giving fresh vigor to the profession of the evangelical counsels. But it has also been a time of tension and struggle, in which well-meaning endeavors have not always met with positive results” (No. 13). I have always been struck by the simple wisdom in those words, which apply not only to religious but to the whole people of God. Let us hope that a careful look at the endeavors of the past and their consequences will prompt fresh and wise new initiatives in the future. **A**

ON THE WEB

A conversation on the visitation with Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M. americamagazine.org/podcast




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A Survivor's Story

Immaculée Ilibagiza's passage to forgiveness

BY GEORGE M. ANDERSON

Forgiving the men who killed my parents and brother was a process, a journey into deeper and deeper prayer," Immaculée Ilibagiza told me as we sat in the lobby of a Manhattan hotel last June. Intense prayer, she said, had helped her survive the three months that she and several other women lay crammed into a small bathroom in the home of a Protestant pastor near her home in the western province of Kibuye, on Lake Kivu. Pastor Murinzi, a Hutu, did not share in the ethnic hatred between Hutu and Tutsi that burst forth in Rwanda in 1994. He took in the eight Tutsi women who begged for refuge at his home. Immaculée's father had sent her running to the pastor's house when a crowd of machete-armed Hutu bore down on the family's home in Mataba in western Rwanda. But her father did not survive, nor did her mother, who was chopped down in front of their house, nor did a beloved brother, Damascene, who was tracked down and murdered weeks later after a presumed friend betrayed his hiding place.

Led by Faith

Ms. Ilibagiza has described her experiences in two books, *Left to Tell* and *Led by Faith*. During our interview, she described some steps of her interior journey: from hatred and a desire for revenge to compassion and forgiveness. Her faith, she said, was rooted largely in devotion to Mary. As she recited the rosary, a verse from the Lord's Prayer ("Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us") helped to begin an inner transformation even as she lay in hiding. Those days were filled with terror, because machete-wielding Hutu frequently searched the pastor's house.

"They searched everywhere, even in the ceilings," she said. "I couldn't imagine that they would not notice the door of the bathroom in the pastor's bedroom, behind which we lay crouched." They came very close. One day, as they were about to open that door, which was all that stood between the women and sudden death, Immaculée heard the searchers say to the pastor, "We trust you." They left, but returned frequently in a less trusting mood. In the bedroom Immaculée had seen a large wardrobe closet; she asked the

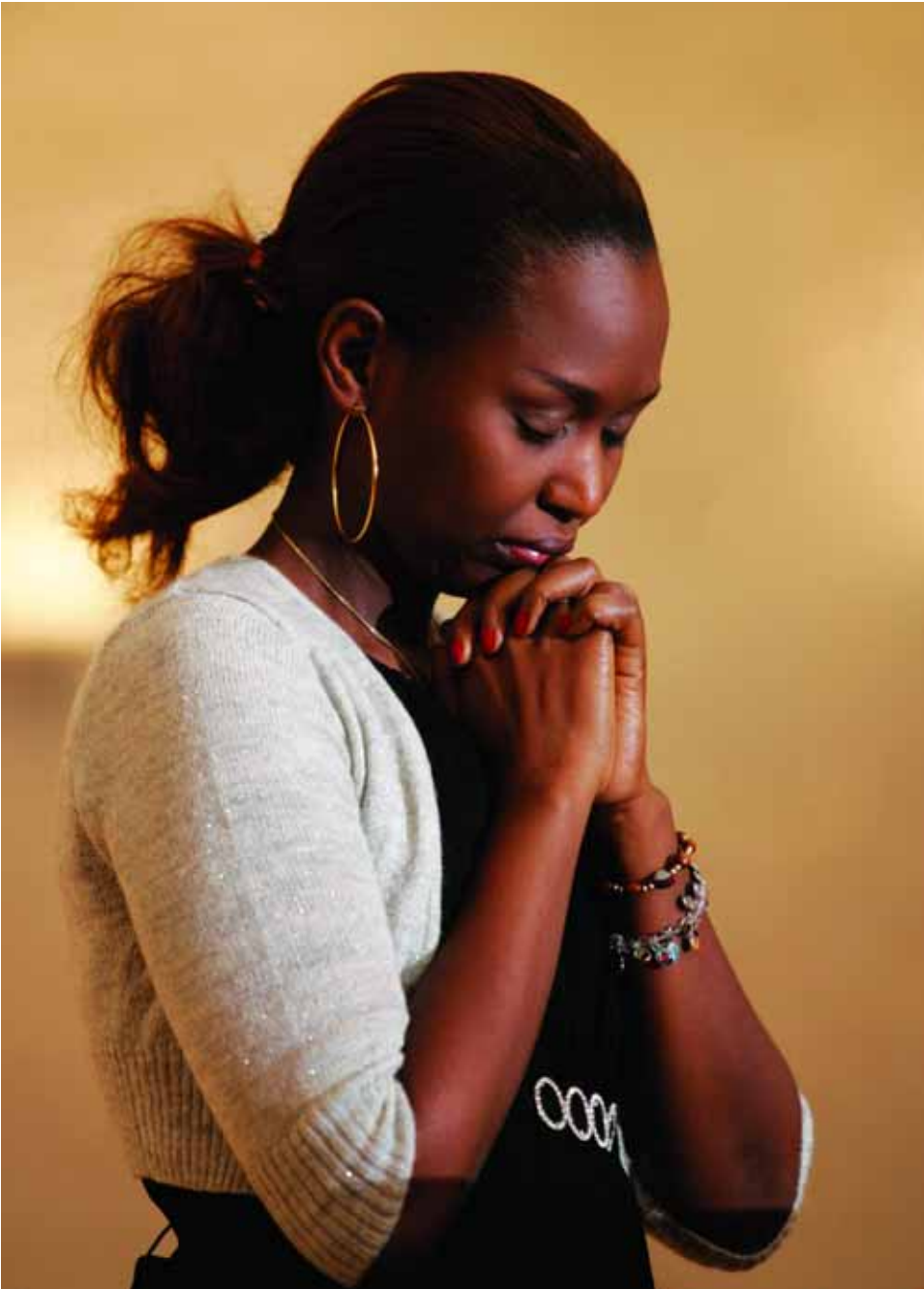
pastor to push it in front of the bathroom door. At first he refused, saying it would make no difference. But sensing that the wardrobe might be the key to survival, she went down on her knees and begged him. He relented and pushed the wardrobe against the door behind which the group lay, hardly daring to breathe. Conversation was impossible except in whispers. A man working in and around the house grew suspicious and often passed by their window, listening for voices.

Immaculée still had the red and white rosary her father had given her before rushing her to the pastor's house. Every day upon waking at 6 a.m., she recited the rosary of the seven sorrows, beginning with Simeon's words to Mary that a sword would pierce her heart. In our conversation, she stressed that she said these prayers from deep within, meaning deeply each word. Again and again, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those" resonated ever more deeply in her heart. "If God really is the father of everyone, including the Hutu who were carrying out the slaughter and looking for me by name—I could hear them calling me as they periodically circled the house," she said. "How could I keep wishing I could destroy them?" She felt she would be lying to God. She also saw an inner image of Jesus on the cross and heard his words, "Forgive them, they do not know what they are doing."

The genocide officially ended with the arrival of French troops in her part of Rwanda, but Immaculée still experienced moments of terror when her faith served as protection. French soldiers loaded several dozen Tutsi into the back of a covered truck to take them to the nearest French camp for survivors. But to their horror the truck halted within a few hundred yards of the camp; a group of Hutu men with machetes stood in the way. The driver told them all to get out, for he had orders to avoid all conflict. Feeling betrayed by the French officer in charge, they got out, and the truck drove away at full speed.

As the frightened group began walking, Immaculée noticed one Hutu in particular who, machete in hand, stared at her menacingly. Instead of averting her eyes, she returned his look and prayed to the Holy Spirit, "You can do it," the "it" meaning "preserve me." The man seemed to be trying to face her down. "I could feel him begin to change, and I

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



Immaculée Ilibagiza hid for weeks from machete-wielding Hutu.

thought, You are a human being like me." Finally, she said, "he blinked and turned away his gaze." The group made it safely to the camp, a poorly provisioned holding area for temporary use until Tutsi could be transported to a larger and more fully equipped camp. At last they were safe.

Here, as on other occasions, Immaculée felt a strong sense of divine providence at work. In the first camp, she met Florence, a young woman who had been attacked with machetes and thrown off a cliff; Florence survived by lying motionless under dead bodies. She told Immaculée, "I can only believe that God spared me for something." To which Immaculée replied, "You're like me, you've been left to tell our story." For her, that story involved spreading the message of God's all-embracing love and forgiveness.

The Necessity of Forgiveness

One of the most dramatic moments in Immaculée's journey toward forgiveness occurred after the genocide finally ended. Felicien, the man who killed her mother and who was personally known to her family as an upstanding member of the community, was in a local jail. Immaculée felt impelled to visit him. By then, she said in the interview, "the work of forgiveness was almost done." Forgiveness had to apply to the Hutu killers in general, but especially to Felicien. She described waiting for the jailers to bring Felicien into the room: "I wasn't quite sure whether I was still going to feel forgiving toward him—I might look at him and change my mind." But once they were face to face, she said, "the forgiveness all became normal." She asked him: "How can you have done this? Killing so many people, you can't be at peace." In rags, he seemed small and confused. "I wanted to reach out to him," she said. "I cried, and then he himself started to cry."

The official in charge of the jail, a Tutsi who was a survivor like Immaculée and who was present during the meeting, grew angry, saying: "How can you do this, forgive the killer of your own mother? Are you crazy?" He gave her permission to slap him and spit on him, but she refused. Instead, her act of forgiveness began to affect the official himself. Later, she heard that he had said, "I will never forget that woman." While she was working at the United Nations office in Kigali, the capital, the official came to see her. "You don't know what you did to me, when you went to the jail and forgave Felicien," he told her. "I was shocked." But he had learned from her encounter with Felicien the necessity for forgiveness.

While in Kigali, Immaculée first felt a need to write about her survival and her journey toward forgiveness of those who took part in the genocide. Co-workers urged her to write it down. Good schooling and two years of university education had given her the skills to undertake the project. One morning, she said, "I just woke up and started typing on a computer, imagining what it would be for someone who knew nothing of the genocide—but also for surviving family members, like a brother who had been studying in another country when the killing began." The first draft took only three weeks. "I'd jump up at 2 a.m., cook a little

PHOTO: ONS/PAUL HARING

food and sit right down to write. It was like an obsession," she said. "I couldn't stop." When she finished, however, she put the manuscript away and did not look at it again for four years. Something she called "a voice of discouragement" gnawed at her: Who do you think you are, an African woman, getting a book published? The same voice of discouragement almost led her to abandon herself to despair while hiding at the pastor's house. But another voice, of hope, proved stronger.

The possibility of publication never left her. On moving to New York in 1998 to work at the United Nations headquarters, a friend invited her to a workshop given by Wayne Dyer, an author and speaker in the area of self-development. After his presentation, she spoke with him. Learning with surprise that she was a Rwandan genocide survivor, he said, "You look happy, after seeing so much horror there." She told him, "It was God who protected me." He asked if she could write a book. "When I told him I had just finished the latest draft, he asked me to send it to him." He in turn sent it to a publishing house that assigned her an editor who has continued to work with her—on four books so far.

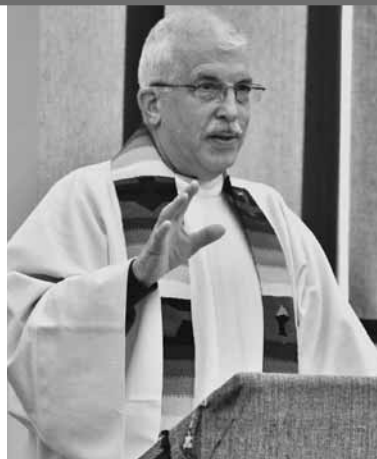
Immaculée travels to Rwanda several times a year. She said that the government is emphasizing forgiveness as a national priority to ease ethnic tensions. But on a personal level, she said, "for Tutsi to be able to forgive is an individu-

al matter, at the level of the heart." Many survivors still have visible machete wounds on their bodies, in addition to wounds of the human spirit from that time when neighbor often turned against neighbor. A report last year by the British Broadcasting Corporation noted that even in the town of Mataba, ethnic hatreds were evident in secondary schools, with Hutu students often harassing Tutsi students. Last year, a parliamentary committee researched 32 schools and found ethnic hatred prevalent in most of them. The report concludes: "Rwanda has made considerable progress in promoting co-existence between its people, but there is obviously a long way to go." Through her message of forgiveness, Immaculée is part of that "way."

In June, Immaculée was working on her latest book, *The Seeds of Forgiveness*. In talks around the United States and in other countries she has emphasized that her own personal experience in Rwanda has ramifications far beyond forgiving the perpetrators of genocide. Instead, the message of forgiveness needs to be fostered in the human heart on a broad level that touches people's everyday lives, not just in times of crisis. After a presentation in the United States, said Immaculée, "One woman told me that she had not spoken to her mother in 20 years. 'But now, I want to call my mother and be reconciled,' the woman said." That comment underscores the universality of Ms. Ilibagiza's message and the eager response of some who hear it. A

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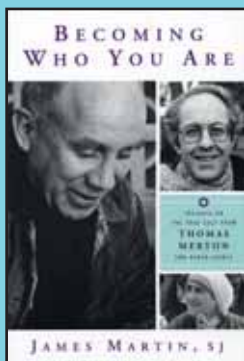
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Monastic Analysis

Looking at the recession through the eyes of Trappists

BY MATT NANNERY

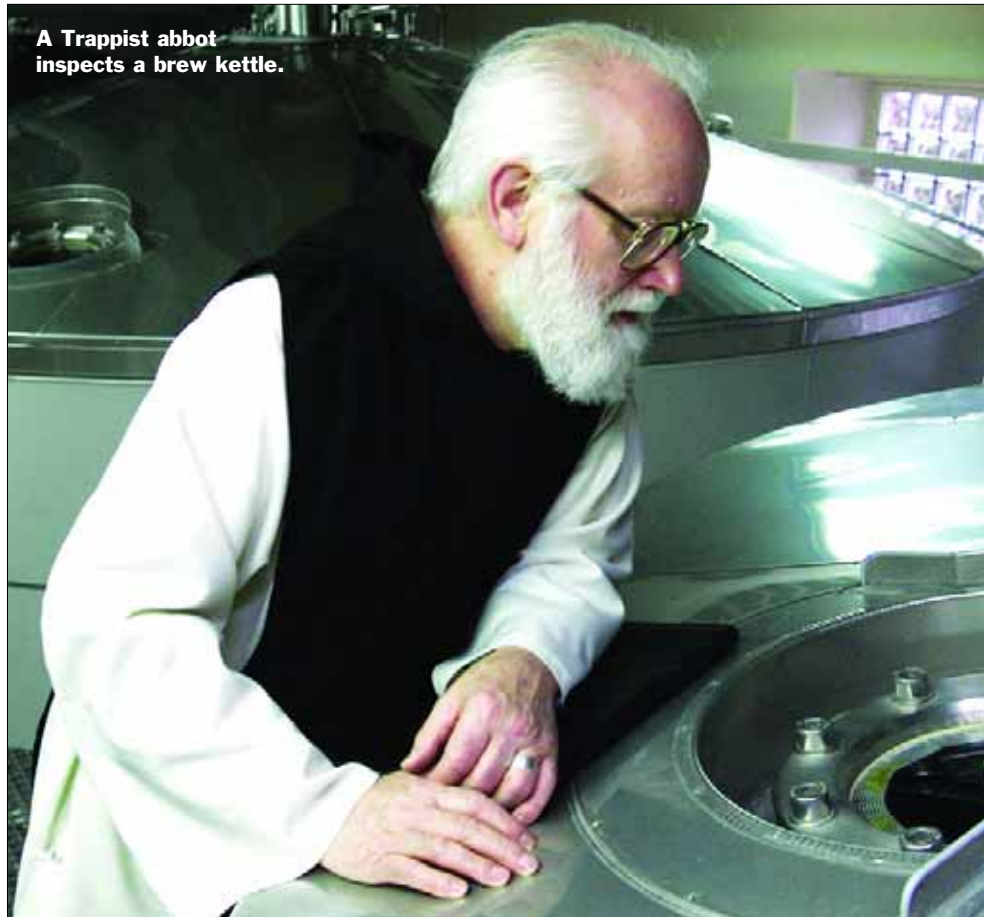
At 2:15 every morning in the dark, silent fields of western New York, small reading lights come on one by one in the chapel stalls of the Abbey of the Genesee. As they have done for most of their adult lives, some 30 Trappist monks are making ready to pray for a world that is still asleep. But this year, something is different. This year that sleep is fitful.

"The bulletin board is filling up with prayer requests for employment," says Brother Paul, who has lived within the monastic enclosure for 23 of his 50 years. "You read them, and you can tell that people are fearful that they'll lose their jobs. Some have already lost them, and some are asking for our intercession because they're going on a job interview."

Unemployed men and women are knocking on the doors of the monastery looking for work in the bakery that financially supports the community. And the soup kitchens in nearby Rochester, N.Y., which are busier now than anyone can remember, eagerly await the weekly run of the monastery bread truck. Currently it makes 30 stops, delivering thousands of loaves of Monks' Bread gratis. As the recession bears down, monks who have voluntarily separated themselves from the world are increasingly aware that they are part of the communities for whom they have been praying all these years.

Yet the monks' own livelihood is not immune to the recession either. "Our bread sales are down \$3,000 to \$4,000 a week," says Kevin Baker, who manages the abbey's finances. That figure represents a 7 percent drop from last year. Basics like white and whole wheat bread have fallen

MATT NANNERY, of Yaphank, N.Y., has been a business reporter and editor for 20 years.



A Trappist abbot inspects a brew kettle.

even further, 14 percent, as supermarket customers switch from \$1.99 Monk's Bread loaves to 99-cent, store-brand specials. "People e-mail us saying, 'You know, I just can't afford the \$1.99 loaf with that 99-cent special staring at me from the shelf,'" Brother Paul adds.

Retreat House Bookings Up

The recession is, literally, coming to the monastery's doorstep. Bookings at its three retreat houses are way up as people seek solitude in order to make sense of the recession's effects on their lives. The retreat houses are booked solid on weekends and, in an unprecedented development, are filling up on weeknights, too.

This all suggests questions: When the realities of the

recession bridge the walls of the monastery, how do monks cope? More important, how can monastic insights help the rest of us deal with the psychological and spiritual toll of an economy that has lost its footing?

“I think monks deal with the same pressures and anxieties as everyone else,” says Brother Isaac, one of the youngest monks at the abbey. “In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells us to consider the lilies of the field and not worry about

it’s really doing is threatening habits that developed in an unreal context.”

Re-evaluating Values

Dom Eudes sees the recession as a way to set things straight. “It’s a way to re-evaluate your values, not just to adapt to restricted means,” he says. “Are people re-evaluating their values now? My impression is that they are not. Maybe people who’ve lost their jobs are. The additional debt we’ve imposed on our children is not the answer. It’s a Band-Aid. Few people think in those terms, but we think that way.”

That is tough talk for people coming to the monastery for solace, not challenge, but Dom Eudes believes it is a message people need to hear—and to process. “Society values short-term goals. The monastic life takes the long view. The whole monastic life is conceived against the background of the end of the world. It’s eschatological. People feel as if they are losing now. But Jesus said that we must lose our life to save it. When you lose, what you have is an invitation to save your life. That’s the bottom line as far as I’m concerned.”


That is not to say, however, that monks are unconcerned with the material world. “If you’re truly living the monastic life, you are very concerned about material realities,” Brother Isaac says. “But not in a fretful, anxious, brooding way. St. Benedict talks about treating every material thing in the monastery as if it’s a sacred vessel.”

Not taking material things for granted requires effort, and in the run of economic good times leading up to the recession, few people stopped to appreciate what we have. Dom Eudes says that was a mistake, but one that can be corrected. How? One way is to meditate on the Acts of the Apostles and put its lessons into action. “In Acts, the original Christian community shared all they had,” he says. “That’s part of the monastic life. People should be mimicking that outside of the monastery now.”

Existential Insecurity

Economic insecurity, however, often prompts people to do the opposite, and therein lies a major problem. “In times of economic crisis, there is a tendency to become preoccupied with my own security,” Brother Isaac explains. “People are thinking, What can I do to keep my little island of security? As monks, we counter that in our lives. Monks think eschatologically. We face a more radical, existential insecurity. We remind ourselves to put our faith in God alone.”

Brother Isaac admits that is easier to do in a monastery than in the work-a-day world, but he insists that it is doable. “It’s hard to tune out all those ads telling us what we should desire,” he says. “Many of those things won’t make somebody secure. Security, as a value, resides at a much deeper level: the understanding that everything that supports your



I pray that the recession ends, but not too soon, not before people take time to reacquaint themselves with what’s really important.

what we’ll eat and drink. They’re gifts from God, and we know that, but the occupational hazard of living in the monastery is that you can take these things for granted. One monk does the laundry, another does the cooking and you don’t have to worry about it. We have a community to fall back on. Not everyone else does.”

That may not be such a bad thing, according to Dom John Eudes Bamberger, who is both a psychiatrist and a monk. “If people are just looking to get past the recession, they are missing an opportunity,” Dom Eudes explains. “Recession, as a human phenomenon, is analogous to other crises that test one’s lifestyle. But that lifestyle, for many Americans, was never real. We were living beyond our means. The recession is hurting people, no doubt. But what

being is a free gift from God. If you focus on God, you become less preoccupied with material realities.”

Dom Eudes advises people to use the recession to “get freer of values that are propagated by a sick society”—materialistic, short-term goals that make people unsettled, even anxious at the first thought that those goals might disappear.

“The recession is letting us approach the reality of the limits of this life,” Dom Eudes explains. “It’s causing pain because it’s disrupting people’s habitual way of living. But we have a philosophy that there should be pain in life. On other continents people are aware of that pain, but many of them are happy. We have to begin asking ourselves why.

“Recession is a disaster,” he continued, “if you think making this life as pleasant as possible is what it’s all about. I would tell the readers of *America* to stop and to look at life in light of their deepest values, not the values that assault

them from television. This reckoning is where the values of the monastic life intersect with the world.”

Kevin Baker, who is both a family man and part of the

monastic community, believes the media have made the recession worse. “From a psychological standpoint, the media have hyped the fear level to the point that people are anxious,” he says. “People are saving more, and that’s not a bad thing. But among the monks there is no fear. And that’s the real difference.”

Brother Paul wants people to come to the monastery and, he hopes, drop those fears beside the tabernacle. He knows that is not easy, but he also knows it can be done. “My father had a gas station when I was growing up,” he says. “And I never

thought of what would happen if my dad lost his job and his gas station went out of business. Now, those fears are real for people. I’d tell them to take things one day at a time and to know that the horizon is always eternity. And to come here and rest—and have some bread. We’ve got lots of that.” **A**

Doctor’s Orders

Dom John Eudes Bamberger, a doctor of psychiatry and a monk, offers the following prescription for coping with the recession:

- ♦ Look at the whole of life, not just at the current situation.
- ♦ Resist “going with the flow” and being satisfied with the values propagated by society.
- ♦ Spend as little time as possible glued to the television.
- ♦ Spend at least 15 minutes a day in quiet meditation and prayer, asking yourself what it means to be a person, what it means to love and whether “this world” is all there is.

The God of Morning

In the dawn

I dreamt of God.

He was riding a bicycle,

His strong hands on the handlebars fiercely,

The rest of him floating, billowing out

like a great sail or a ghost.

I thought he did not know where

He was headed,

Or much cared for that matter,

But one thing was certain:

He was never letting go.

He took no note of me,

Hurling on,

Singular, determined,

Like a frightened parent

Summoned in the night

To unknown heartache.

In the morning

I awoke,

And fell in love with him

All over again.

KATHLEEN F. PESTA

Kathleen F. Pesta has recently retired after 30 years teaching religious studies and English at The Prout School in Wakefield, R.I.

After the Storm

What nature teaches about boom and crash

BY KYLE T. KRAMER

A late-January ice storm that caused much destruction in the Midwest began with stunning beauty, as the landscape was transformed into a lovely glass statue of itself, glinting in the dying light of evening. In the darkness, however, the glass began to shatter. I lay awake, hearing the eerie and sickening sound of crack upon crash in the woodlot of our farm.

Soon after the storm, I hiked through the woods, anxious about what I might find. The damage was appalling. When I bought the property a decade ago, the woodlot had just been cut over, heavily and carelessly, but by now it was beginning to recover. The poplars, black walnuts, hickories, maples and oaks that were spared by the timber cutter had grown back to a respectable size. The ice storm, however, had been almost as merciless as that earlier logging. Large limbs and entire tops of trees had come down, and the denuded trunks looked like sloppily sharpened spears. Several large trees had snapped at their base. Others had toppled over along with their entire root ball. These stood throughout the woods like 10-foot-tall earthen tombstones.

A Different Storm

The current economic crisis also had an auspicious beginning. The

KYLE T. KRAMER is the director of lay degree programs at Saint Meinrad School of Theology in Saint Meinrad, Ind., and an organic farmer.

booming housing market heralded a rising tide of prosperity, and it brought profit and the privilege of home ownership to millions. When subprime mortgage holders began to default, however, many over-leveraged investment banks that held supposedly rock-solid mortgage-backed securities discovered themselves to be as fragile as glass, burdened with bad assets. In a crash heard around the world, they collapsed into insolvency, froze credit

markets and brought down much of the domestic and global economy with them.

It seems that destructive events, from within and without, are inevitable in both natural systems and the world of human economics. I have been thinking about how differently damage and recovery play out in both these arenas: in the tangible economy of my woodlot, for example, compared with the current economic downturn.

Giants have fallen in both the economy and my woodlot, but with vastly different effects. The failure of behemoth financial firms like Lehman Brothers set off a chain reaction of destruction. While most high-level executives in failing companies have retained plenty of cushion—and in many cases, even their bonuses—the domestic and global poor are suffering the most, despite having little or no responsibility for the financial wreckage.

In the woodlot, however, the reverse was true. The older, larger trees buckled under the weight of accumulated ice, and they had no golden parachutes. The younger, smaller, suppler trees withstood the storm, except for the unfortunate few in the path of the falling elders.

Recovery has begun, and it too looks vastly different in the two realms. I marvel at the boldness of our president and the obvious intelligence of the experts he assembled to put the United States on the path of economic



ART: DAN SALAMIDA

recovery. Not being one of those brilliant economic experts myself, I have no idea whether the government's economic stimulus is too much, as most conservative Republicans believe, or not enough, as the liberal economist Paul Krugman warns. Regardless, I am astounded at the incomprehensible sums of borrowed capital the government is committing to it. Judging from the wildly varying opinions and predictions about the stimulus, I also suspect that no one really knows to what extent it will work. I think that one reason the government is acting so dramatically is that we all have a psychological need for something to be done so that we can reassure ourselves that we have some measure of control over the unpredictable animal our economy has become.

Woodlot Resurrection

I too wanted to take charge and to make order out of our woodlot chaos. Since the storm I have been at work with a chainsaw. I am sectioning and splitting the limbs and tops for many years' worth of firewood and hauling

the butt logs to a local mill, where they will be sawn into lumber for my various woodworking projects. But as glad as I am to put the fallen trees to good use as fuel and to resurrect some as furniture, I still can't help but feel a bit rueful about my clean-up efforts. I have filled the quiet with the noisy snarl of my saw, polluted the air with the stink of its exhaust and rutted the soft ground with my tractor. As I have done so, it is never far from my mind that in time, the woods would have recovered just fine on their own, patiently turning the downed trees and limbs into soil-enriching humus (providing shelter and food for innumerable creatures in the process) and repopulating the sunny canopy openings with new saplings—all with no expenditure of human energy or effort.

President Obama has framed our country's radical deficit spending as an investment in future growth and security: putting a new foundation under the economy. I hope he is right, although I cannot help but worry that we are mortgaging our future simply to ensure the least possible disruption to

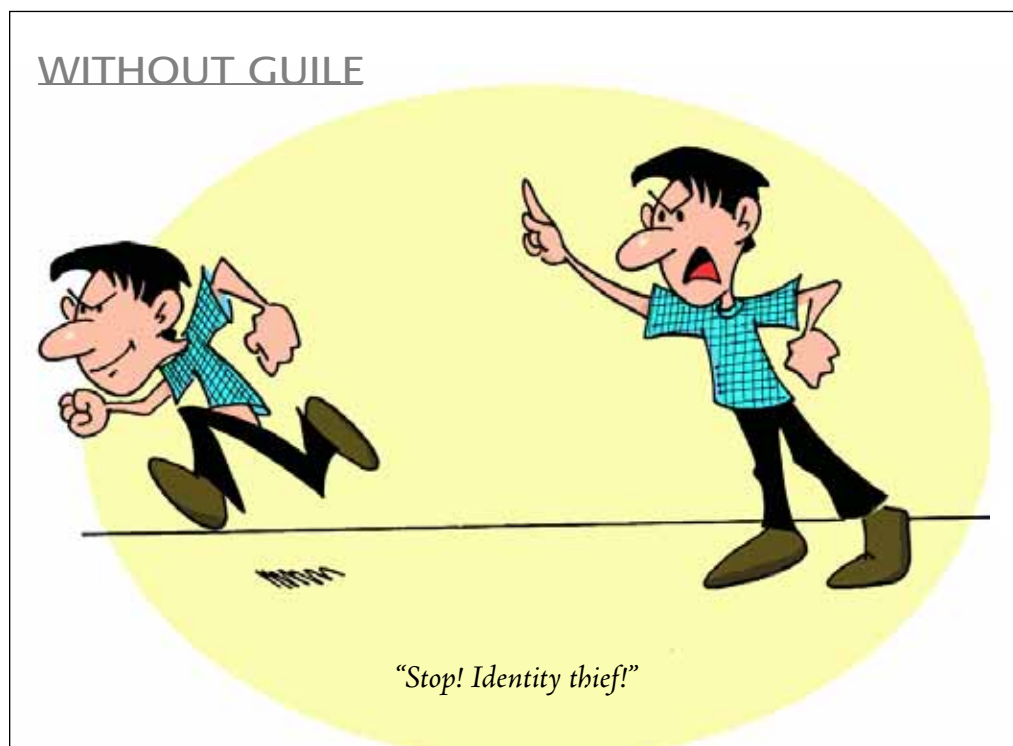
our present. In natural systems, on the other hand, the present always ensures the future, even amid damage and destruction. Nature does not borrow; nature builds. Nature does not use "leverage" or "spread" or, God forbid, engage in "naked short selling." Its slow but steady rate of return is the expanding girth of the trees, the gradual accretion of soil, the sunlight and rain that become grass in the field, grain in the ear, flesh on the bone.

What might the human economy look like if it adhered more closely to nature's principles, so that instead of using up and degrading the natural world, we continually improved and enriched it? So that the inevitable destructive periods would not cause so much suffering? So that recovery would not risk, borrow from and burden the future? What might it look like if the little economy of human artifice fit harmoniously within what Wendell Berry termed the great economy of the natural world, which is shaped by God's hands and within whose rules and bounds all human economies must exist? Discovering this would be a true economic recovery,

far more profound than the mere reinflation of the Dow and the Standard & Poor's calculations. The need for it is urgent, as human activity displaces and disturbs more and more of the natural world, from which we so desperately need to learn.

A World Without Waste

Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and Hunter Lovins have tried to imagine a better melding of human and natural economies in their fine book, *Natural Capitalism*. They build their ideas on three fundamental principles of natural systems, which Hawken introduced in his



CARTOON BY DAVE LONDON

earlier work, *The Ecology of Commerce*, and which, if followed, would make for a more sustainable human economy.

First, in the natural world, there is essentially no waste. Even amid damage and destruction, natural capital is always recycled. If our human economy truly recognized that we live on a finite planet and that there is ultimately no “away” place to throw our garbage, we would follow suit. Manufacturing would take a cradle-to-cradle approach, making durable goods that at the end of their useful service could be transformed into new products with minimal energy input.

Second, nature runs on current solar income. Mimicking this, a more sustainable human economy would wean itself from the ancient, stored solar energy of fossil fuels and meet its energy needs through photovoltaic cells, solar thermal, wind power and other renewable systems that ultimately depend on the sun.

Finally, natural systems are complex and diverse in a way that increases their resilience and durability. Sustainable human economies would avoid oversimplification (as with monocrop agriculture) and impenetrable complexity (like financial derivatives)—both of which make them vulnerable to the vagaries of weather and human weakness.

Instead, they would be smaller in scale, with more decentralized and diverse networks of production and consumption. This would demand intimate and detailed knowledge of particular locales, since one size never fits all. It would also recognize the limits of human knowledge (and virtue), and therefore act with greater caution and humility in order to avoid large-scale ecological or financial destruction.

I am neither clever enough to imagine exactly how such economies might evolve, nor influential enough to implement a vision even if I had one.

What does a man in the field like me do?

First, I pray. Only by God’s grace will the human family overcome the greatest communal challenge it has yet faced: learning (quickly!) to survive and thrive peaceably within the limits of the divinely designed great economy. Only God’s grace can help and heal our inevitable failures and mistakes—especially as natural systems become more volatile and less predictable because of climate change. Only God’s grace can keep us from despairing at the difficulties these challenges entail.

Then I work. Faith without works is dead, and practice is both a means and a measure of prayer. The sphere of direct influence for most of us is near at hand, where we can rediscover the sacred, satisfying task of

reshaping our own household and community economies to emulate better the economy of the natural world. On our farm, I face a lifetime of challenge to make my efforts in the fields echo the elegant work of nature in the damaged but recovering wood-

lot. Wherever we might live, there is work to do.

All of us can begin to take small steps in our homes

and local communities to meet our needs for food, water, shelter, energy, transportation and livelihood in a way that learns from and cooperates with nature. These steps toward genuine sustainability are signs of a true recovery, not just of our economy but of our sanity, safety and security. Then we, by will and knowledge, as the rest of creation is by instinct, shall truly be orthodox, giving right praise and glory to the Creator. **A**

ON THE WEB

Pictures of the storm’s aftermath.
americamagazine.org/slideshow



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ART | JON M. SWEENEY

LET THERE BE COMICS

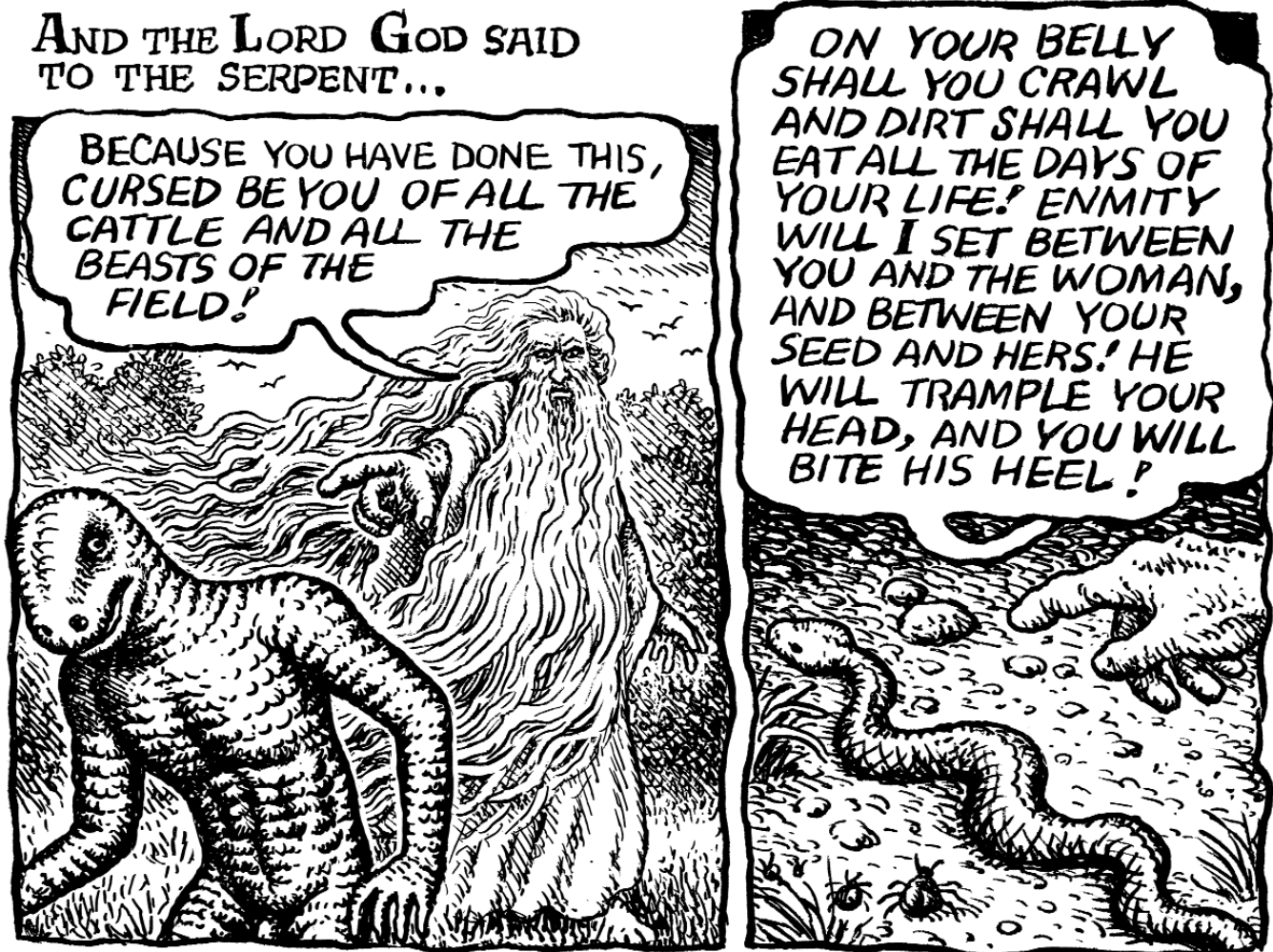
The Book of Genesis, according to R. Crumb

If you are above a certain age, you probably haven't looked at a comic book since the days of Superman and Archie. (Archie's getting married, by the way.) And if you are below that same certain age, chances are that you haven't read the Bible much. The infamous Robert Dennis Crumb is about to change all that.

R. Crumb, as he styles himself, was

born in 1943. By the late 1960s he was at the center of the countercultural arts movement in San Francisco, creating the first issue of Zap Comix in 1968. No one had ever seen a comic book like it. Crumb called it "psychedelic," and in keeping with the spirit of the times, he credited his use of LSD for the vivid style he created. Kids raised on Archie and Veronica were in for something new.

Crumb has always upset people; in fact, he likes doing so. He belongs to the modern—more than the post-modern—tradition that believes art is more successful when it unsettles us. Still, Crumb leaves people with the feeling that he is just messing around rather than trying to offend. Since the 1960s, for instance, his illustrations of African-Americans have been exaggerated in the direction of physical stereotypes. Likewise, he has often characterized women in overly sexualized ways: they are often huge, Amazon-like figures. At the same time, Crumb's imposing women are sometimes shown in physical sub-



ART ON PAGES 24 AND 25: COURTESY OF W. W. NORTON & CO. EXCERPTED FROM THE BOOK OF GENESIS ILLUSTRATED BY R. CRUMB. COPYRIGHT © 2009 BY R. CRUMB. FROM GENESIS: TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY, TRANSLATED BY ROBERT ALTER.

servience to equally “buff” men. But again, Crumb says that he is just having fun.

For these reasons, Crumb’s illustrated version of the Book of Genesis has been widely anticipated, even dreaded, since the first announcement of the project. What would the notorious illustrator do with this material? Those who take the Bible seriously are not interested in someone casually poking fun at it. Aficionados know that the first issue of Zap Comix included on the front cover: “Fair Warning: For Adult Intellectuals Only.” R. Crumb’s **The Book of Genesis**, just published by W. W. Norton, includes this legend on its cover: “Adult Supervision Recommended for Minors” and scrawled onto an image of a scroll: “The first book of the Bible graphically depicted! Nothing left out!” Oy vey.

A depiction of God—that is, the Torah’s YHWH—also appears on the front cover of this new Genesis, so Crumb clearly is not aiming to please Jews with his artistic efforts. Anthropomorphic representations of the deity are offensive to many and so may render Crumb’s book unusable to a great many believers. Still, his new Genesis is receiving notice from Christians, Jews and people who would never otherwise buy or read the Bible.

In a recent interview with Comic Art Magazine, Crumb talked about the earnest comic-book presentations of the Bible produced decades ago and distributed in Sunday schools: “The drawing’s not very good, sloppily done. And they also just make [stuff] up to gloss over and fill in whole passages. They have Eve saying, ‘Mmm, this apple tastes really good.’”

Crumb’s illustration does not gloss over anything. It’s all here in graphic detail: God creating Adam from dirt, Cain’s bloody slaughtering of Abel, Lot’s incest with his daughters, and plenty of drunkenness, prostitution,



pillaging, drowning, other murders, including human sacrifice—all in honest and salacious detail. That’s the Bible, after all. (The artist uses the fine translation of Genesis by Robert Alter, a professor at the University of California, with an occasional nod to the King James Version.)

The familiar characters of Genesis are shown doing some unfamiliar things. Most memorable is the panel that illustrates, “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh.... And the two of them were

naked, the man and the woman, and they were not ashamed.” Not ashamed, indeed. They are depicted expressing joy as well as a ravenous physical appetite for each other.

Crumb’s God is not a domesticated one, nor a benign or fatherly figure. He physically breathes into Adam to create him; he snarls when talking about destroying the world by the flood. In his illustration of the tale of Sodom and Gomorrah, Crumb includes three large panels for the verse, “And the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord from out of the heavens.” The second and third panels show a vivid depiction of the most painful sorts of deaths, framed only by the words “from the Lord” and “from out of the heavens.”

Even the serpent who deceives Adam and Eve is a creature far different from what many might imagine. Before God pronounces the curse upon him, “On your belly shall you crawl,” the serpent is ominously human and reptilian—with a bit of alien thrown in.

My copy of Crumb’s *Genesis* was sitting on my coffee table last week when the 8-year-old son of a friend stopped by with his mother and older sister. The boy studies short portions of the Torah each week in Hebrew school. He couldn’t take his eyes off my Crumb. His mother finally took it away from him, not sure if the boy’s interest would be well rewarded or not. I believe it would be.

At the same time, I thought to myself: Thank God Crumb didn’t decide to illustrate the Koran.

ON THE WEB
Regina Nigro reviews
the TV series “V.”
americamagazine.org/culture

JON M. SWEENEY is the author of several books including *Almost Catholic* (Jossey-Bass) and *Cloister Talks: Learning from My Friends the Monks* (Brazos Press).

HOW IT BEGAN

AMONG THE GENTILES Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity

By Luke Timothy Johnson
Yale Univ. Press. 480p \$32.50
ISBN 9780300142082

While many of us have come to recognize that some New Testament books and early Christian writings treat Jews and Judaism harshly, few of us advert to their denunciations of pagan religions as idolatrous and even demonic. Yet it is also clear that the first Christians borrowed many of their key theological terms and concepts not only from the Jewish tradition but also from the Greco-Roman culture surrounding them. This volume, which is part of the Anchor Yale (formerly Doubleday) Bible Reference Library, contends that new perspectives and new knowledge (archaeological and textual) combined enable us to examine the question of early Christianity and Greco-Roman religions with fresh eyes.

Luke Timothy Johnson, professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, is well respected for his excellent commentaries on various New Testament books and his many essays on biblical theology. He is also the author of the highly regarded book *Religious Experience in Early Christianity* (1998). In this volume his focus is on ways of being religious in the world in which early Christianity took shape.

The methodology Johnson adopts here is that of religious studies (the stance of the objective observer) rather than theology (the perspective of the engaged participant). His concern is analysis rather than advocacy or apologetics. He wants to be descriptive

rather than prescriptive. In this way he hopes to clarify how early Christians expressed their religious impulses in comparison with their Gentile and Jewish neighbors. He wants to show the continuities and similarities rather than the dichotomies and differences. The title, *Among the Gentiles*, plays off the biblical motif of Christianity (and



Judaism) as a “light to the Gentiles.”

Johnson defines religion broadly as “a constructive human activity in which experiences and convictions concerning ultimate power both depend on and reshape people’s social structures and symbolic worlds, enabling a way of life based on and seeking to express through a variety of practices those experiences and convictions.” Basic to his analysis throughout the book is a fourfold typology of ways of being religious in antiquity: participation in divine benefits, moral transformation, transcending the world and stabilizing the world.

After general observations about religion in the Greco-Roman world,

Johnson develops his typology with concrete examples: religion as access to the divine through pious practices, and salvation as success and security in this life (Aelius Aristides, an orator in the second century A.D.); religion as moral transformation in line with the moral purpose of the god within (Epictetus, a Stoic teacher); religion as the pursuit of the immortal soul’s release from imprisonment in the body (*Poimandres*, a Hermetic tractate); and worship in the service of the city/empire, and the city/empire as the locus for divine beneficence (Plutarch, a priest-philosopher). Johnson presents these figures as representing distinctive ways of being religious, not rigidly separated from one another.

After suggesting that this typology applies also to Judaism between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200, Johnson explores how the Gospels describe Jesus as the ultimate bringer of divine benefits and how Paul interpreted Jesus’ death and resurrection as the most powerful way in which believers can participate in those benefits. Then he considers how Paul, James and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews were also very much concerned with the moral transformation of those whom they addressed. He also notes that the first-century Christians were not capable of (and so not much interested in) either stabilizing or transcending the world.

Christianity in the second and third centuries provides Johnson with full scope for developing and applying his fourfold typology: participating in divine benefits (the apocryphal acts and gospels, Montanism, martyr piety); moral transformation (Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen); transcending the world (various Gnostics); and stabilizing the world (bishops, church orders, Irenaeus, Cyprian). When Constantine made Christianity the imperial religion, the first and fourth expressions of religion came to

dominate, while the second approach turned into monasticism and the third approach expressed itself in Manichaeism and other Gnostic movements.

With this work Johnson stands in the great tradition of William James's classic, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). In other writings, James, the pragmatist philosopher, insisted on the "cash value" of ideas. The cash value of this book includes a fresh and imaginative look at Christian origins, an excellent example of effective pedagogy and a helpful challenge to the Christian church's approach to other religious expressions today.

Johnson brings alive the religious world in which Christianity originated and developed. By focusing on specific representatives of Greco-Roman religious life, he provides well-defined models of what he is talking about. His typology then allows us to understand better not only Greco-Roman religions but also Judaism and early Christianity in new ways. And because these four types are to some extent still alive and well among us today, we as readers can easily connect with the ancient approaches to religion.

Clearly an experienced and effective teacher, Johnson offers regular statements about his religious-studies methodology and what can and cannot be expected from it, as well as frequent summaries by way of introduction and conclusion to a topic. His book is well organized, and its argument is easy to follow. His writing is straightforward, lively and engaging. His observations are backed up by the many references to ancient sources and modern scholarship that are contained in the almost 120 pages of endnotes.

Though not a work of theology, Johnson's study does have an underlying theological agenda. His ultimate hope is that Christians today might learn from the complex interactions among the religious expressions out of

which Christianity emerged and so be more willing to "embrace a catholicity of religious sensibility and expression" as they interact with fellow Christians and representatives of other religions, rather than meeting them with defensiveness and even derision. This hope for mutual understanding and respect between religions is, of course, in line with the Second Vatican Council's

document on the Catholic Church's relationship with other religions (*Nostra Aetate*), which despite its brevity has turned out to be one of the most important of the council's documents.

DANIEL J. HARRINGTON, S.J., is professor of New Testament and editor of *New Testament Abstracts* at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

KELLY CHERRY

KATRINA LAND

THE SOUTHERN CROSS Stories

By Skip Horack
Mariner Books. 224p
\$13.95 (paperback)
ISBN 9780547232782

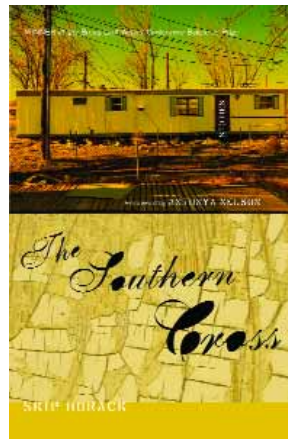
The Gulf Coast crosses the South from Florida to Texas, five states, and some may think of the coast as a sixth, defined as it is by ports of call, oil rigs, casinos and an ethnically diverse population. Fishing vessels ply the waterways; so do 'gators and seagulls. Neither the men nor the women who work and live there are easily shocked. Life on a waterfront wises people up. References to prison occur with some regularity.

Skip Horack's debut book, a collection of 16 short stories set on or around the Gulf Coast, brings us close to these hard-knuckled but fair-minded men and women. As the accomplished fiction writer Antonya Nelson, who selected Horack's book for the Bakeless Prize sponsored by the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, informs us in her brief foreword, "Every one of these stories serves up a unique world peopled by individuals who could,

each of them, star in his or her own series."

It is the year of Katrina. A child named Kenyatta announces to a stevedore that she has, with her Bible, killed the "serpent" under his house. Now she needs him to buy her a new "King James." Later, she warns him that "Reverend Gray says they gonna punish this city soon enough." Clayton (the stevedore) wonders what brought a cottonmouth to the basement of his "clapboard shotgun." The reader will wonder if the cottonmouth is an early indication of Katrina.

As tough as the men are, the women may be tougher. It is a real pleasure to read a male writer who can tell a story from a satisfactory female point of view—the view of believable, equal women who live their lives with hope but without illusion. In "Junebelle" an elderly widow whose children have parked her in a retirement home plays along with her family and the staff but endures an anguished loneliness. In the lounge she chats first with the bartender, then with a man named Bud Long. By the end of the story Junebelle and Bud are



allied in their outlook on the world. That is all, but it is enough to render them individual and real.

These stories make no attempt to explain themselves, and they do not insist upon significance. Like the characters they are about, they simply present themselves on the page unbutressed by fanfare or symbolism or even a backstory. Surely this is a mark of a committed and confident author. Horack, a former lawyer who studied writing at Stanford University as a Stegner Fellow, now teaches there. Perhaps one can discern in the epigraph to this book a reason for his refusal to adorn his stories with epiphany or reflection. Citing Alfred North Whitehead, the epigraph reminds us that "the essence of dramatic tragedy...resides in the solemnity of the remorseless working of things." Solemnity of this sort does not preclude humor or a happy ending. It does suggest a world whose flaws will

be duly revealed.

Thus, in "The Redfish," Hurricane Katrina comes to the fore:

The bossman called late Saturday and offered time-and-a-half cash wages in exchange for Luther's help clearing the dock, a hand moving equipment into the warehouse while the rest of the city evacuated.

Nine months out of Angola Prison, Luther, otherwise known as Redfish Jackson, wants no trouble, just a job. He declines to leave New Orleans as long as there is money to be made. When at last he and his girlfriend, Shonda, heading out, stop to pick up her mother, Luther learns that Shonda is already married—and her husband is holding a shotgun that is pointed at him. Shonda and her husband wrap him in duct tape.

By the time Luther gets his hands

free, Shonda and her husband are gone. He finds her mother duct-taped in the closet. Gently, he removes the tape.

Luther did time for a crime he did not commit, although he may have committed another. The real criminal finally confessed. (The police find black men interchangeable.) Luther and Shonda's mother, Betty, create some soup and wait for Katrina to make landfall. He tries but cannot talk Betty into leaving her trailer. He saves himself.

Is there a touch of broad humor here? I think so, but it is a knotty kind of humor, more like that of Faulkner or Flannery than George Garrett or George Singleton.

"The High Place I Go" introduces us to a married nurse who is having an affair with a paraplegic veteran of the Iraq war; he is 15 years younger. "Of all the hospitals in all the towns in all the world," she tells him, as if she were Bogart and he Bergman.

With memorable characters and interesting plots, *The Southern Cross* should make a favorable impression on its readers. But plot or character is not the star here, language is. Precise, informative, evocative, surprising, the language of these stories shines with hard brilliance. We hear how a rabbit farmer talks. "I was her husband," he says, explaining himself to a young cop, the past tense exposing his sad loss of self. In "Borderlands" we read of one girl that "a pool of girls absorbed her like a bead of mercury." The protagonist of the closing story "fished the back, dead-end waters above North Pass, stretching small nets along the trespasses and washout gaps where bayous bled into the swamp."

Horack is a new, vigorous voice, not loud but splendidly clear.

KELLY CHERRY is the author of 17 books of fiction, nonfiction and poetry, most recently *Hazard and Prospect: New and Selected Poems*.

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LETTERS

Hard to Imagine

Thank you for printing the wonderful article "Our Brothers, the Jews," by Dorothy Day (11/9). It is an illuminating time capsule of prior years. I cannot imagine the United States as it was described. It was warming to hear the words *mystical body*, words that are not mentioned much any more.

RICHARD BENITEZ
San Francisco, Calif.

Real Catholicism

Unfortunately, many things have not changed since Dorothy Day's time—but the scapegoat has. Now it is the Hispanics from south of the border. Americans, including a large number of Catholics, shout about how they are creating problems in communities. What an article Dorothy Day could

write if she were still with us! She made Catholicism real for me.

ANTOINETTE CARBONE
Riverhead, N.Y.

Anger Leading to Action

Dorothy Day's disturbance over anti-Semitism among U.S. Catholics intensified in the months after she submitted her manuscript to *America*. She was so incensed with the anti-Semitism of the Rev. Charles Coughlin, the famous radio priest, that along with Ed Marciniak and Martin Carrabine, S.J., of Chicago, she founded the Committee of Catholics to Fight Anti-Semitism in early 1939. They published a newspaper, *Voice*, and hawked it on the streets, sometimes in direct confrontation with Coughlin's salespeople. His paper was misnamed *Social Justice*.

BILL DROEL
Worth, Ill.

Autism: Legal Remedies

Thank you for highlighting the important issue of autism (Editorial, "An Untreated Epidemic?" 11/2). As a civil rights lawyer, I would fault the editorial for its failure to make even a passing reference to critical legal protections that should enable children and adults with autism to live with dignity as persons with disabilities. The federal government has never fully honored its financial commitment under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, originally enacted as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in the 1970s, to provide for this nation's children with disabilities a free, appropriate public education. Ten years after the Supreme Court said that federal law requires that individuals with disabilities receive services in the most integrated setting possible, the federal and state

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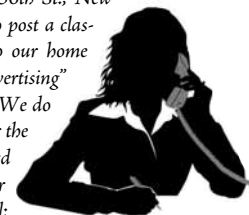
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governments have been slow to implement a plan to move our brothers and sisters in nursing home facilities (some of whom have autism) into community settings with appropriate supports.

I do not discount the importance of finding ways to alleviate or eliminate suffering that is a consequence of the physical or mental limitations that disabilities cause. But we must realize that there may be generations of persons with autism and their families who will not benefit from a “cure,” and we must offer them dignity today, not just hope for tomorrow. I urge that we invest just as much energy to ensure that we continue to benefit as a society from what our citizens with disabilities have to offer just as they are. Jesus did not just tell us about what awaited us after this life of suffering. He exhorted us to act right now, reminding us that the “Kingdom of God is at hand.” Strengthening and enforcing the laws and structures already in place for persons with autism and other disabilities is something we can do today.

CHRIS KUCZYNSKI
Baltimore, Md.

Turning the Tide

Thank you for presenting one of the most unbiased, comprehensive articles about the autism epidemic that I have ever read. As executive director of a nonprofit that funds grants for families that cannot access or afford treatment (Autism Care and Treatment Today, or ACT Today!), I can tell you that we must do something to help the vast numbers of families in this country who simply cannot cope with the financial and emotional toll that autism takes on their lives. It is time to say we have had enough to the special interests that protect their own well-being over the well-being of our future

generations. It is time to take care of the legions of individuals suffering with the disorder today and turn the tide before it is too late.

NANCY ALSPAUGH-JACKSON
Los Angeles, Calif.

Help Needed

Thank you for bringing attention to the enormous, complex issues related to autism. For a follow-up article I recommend that you do an examination of how the Catholic Church is responding to this epidemic. My own experience with my autistic son and autistic daughter was very negative. They (and I) received no support, acceptance or anything remotely loving from the local churches we belonged to. My daughter, now age 38, has never received Confirmation and refuses to attend church. My son, age 43, found more comfort in the local evangelical church. Our church had nothing to offer them as instruction in the faith.

Now the issue is what will happen to them when I die? I am depending completely on the state to provide services, and a few relatives. In my city, the only Catholic-sponsored services for developmentally disabled adults are a training school and a residence. But my children are too high functioning for either resource. We cannot look to our parish priests as they are overwhelmed. It seems to me a betrayal of Christ for Catholics as individuals and as a church to neglect such vulnerable families.

The last paragraph of your editorial really struck home. Jesus cannot be pleased. I wonder what the social justice and culture-of-life people are doing to help, heal or at the very least comfort. Surely our families deserve the attention of these groups.

JANICE JOHNSON
San Diego, Calif.

Growing Through Doubts

Re “Pastoring Atheists,” by Thomas J. Santen (11/2): Indeed, God shows us the value of every doubting Thomas in our own spiritual lives. Friends, family, atheists all—make me more knowledgeable about my own religion and culture, more compassionate and a better Catholic. Centering prayer allows us a kind of “monastic” time out of the hurly-burly of our culture and inner mind chatter, a time for the whisper of grace to be heard. Doubt is part of God’s gift to us. It allows us to examine, expand and deepen our views of God.

ROBERTA GITTENS
Cathedral City, Calif.

A Bold Papal Move

Re “Bridge Over the River Tiber,” by Austen Ivereigh (11/16): “The Anglican Church United Not Absorbed” was the title of a famous paper read by the Belgian Benedictine Dom Lambert Beauduin at the Malines Conversations (between Catholics and Anglicans) in 1925. Pope Paul VI echoed this idea when he canonized the English martyrs in 1970, saying that “when the unity of faith and life is restored...there will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and usage proper to the Anglican Church...[our] ever beloved sister.”

We have said for decades that the only prerequisite for unity is agreement in faith. Once that is achieved, everything else is negotiable. With his bold move Pope Benedict XVI has made it a reality. Will the response of Anglicans who have declared that they are already one with us in faith (the ones to whom the pope’s offer is addressed) be equally bold?

(REV.) JOHN JAY HUGHES
St. Louis, Mo.

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Promises Fulfilled

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C), NOV. 29, 2009

Readings: Jr 33:14-16; Ps 25:4-14; 1 Th 3:12-4:2; Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

“Beware that your hearts not become drowsy” (Lk 21:34)

How do people who fall in love sustain their hopeful expectation of one another throughout their lives? Some relationships begin to crumble after the infatuation wears off, the delight in mutual commitment fades and routine life settles in. Others weather the passage of time with moments of renewed celebration of promises made and kept and of crises faced together, strengthening the lifelong bond. Such experiences in human relationships reveal something of how God interacts with us.

As Advent begins, people in the Northern Hemisphere may be inclined to snuggle into the shortened, dark days of approaching winter to calmly contemplate the coming of Christ. But the readings put us in a crisis mode that is anything but restful. Jeremiah addresses the exiles, who are undergoing great distress. He had earlier prophesied that the Davidic dynasty would be restored soon after the fall of Jerusalem. Instead, the weary exiles have experienced disaster after disaster, and they are grasping for some sign of hope. “The days are coming” is an expression that in the Bible ordinarily introduces a pronouncement of judgment, instilling fear in the hearers. Instead, Jeremiah uses the phrase to startle the care-worn exiles

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with an assurance that God will fulfill the promises made to Israel and Judah.

As partners whose relationship has hit the rocks may be able to recapture the initial fervor of their love when reminded of the joy and delight with which their promises of commitment were made, so God’s beloved

are wooed away from their woes to focus on the sure promise of redemption at hand. There is a word play: Israel’s last king was Zedekiah, whose name derives from the Hebrew word for “justice.” While the people look for a new “just shoot” from David’s branch, Jeremiah proclaims that it is God’s own self who is “our justice.”

While Jeremiah’s hearers were waiting for fulfillment of God’s promises in an existing crisis, Luke’s and Paul’s hearers are waiting for an apocalyptic end time that seems long in coming. Luke’s warning is not to let one’s heart grow drowsy during the long wait. Like lovers whose passion fades and whose lives are lulled into routine, the people’s ardor may dim, and they may be found unprepared for the coming crisis. Luke advises not letting our hearts go after things that satisfy only for a time and not becoming weighed down with anxiety. Be always watchful, he says, so as not to be taken by surprise. Pray for strength and do not be at all afraid. Stand tall, he says, raise

your heads and be ready for the embrace of the one who is love.

Paul tells the Thessalonians to strengthen their hearts. He prays, “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all,” reminding us that it is God who initiates and sustains us in love, and that it is a love meant to be shared with all.

Daily prayer and practices of loving outreach prepare us well for the crisis times when disaster strikes, when jobs are lost, when ill-



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How are you keeping your heart from becoming drowsy this Advent?
- How has God strengthened your heart in times of crisis?
- How have you experienced the God who fulfills promises?

ART: TAD DUNNE

ness or death turns our world awry, when violence rips at the fabric of our world. With hearts already strengthened by God’s love, we are able to withstand any assault.

The expectation of the birth of a child often can reignite the ardor of a flagging love relationship. So, too, in Advent, if our hearts are weary or drowsy, our preparation for the celebration of the Christ, who has already been born as one of us, can spark our love once again, not only toward the one who came as a child in our midst, but to all God’s beloved children.

BARBARA E. REID

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