

America

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The Visitation And Vatican II

FRANCINE CARDMAN

Handling Parish Conflict

ANN GARRIDO AND
SHEILA HEEN



OF MANY THINGS

I don't like the sound of my own voice. Or at least I didn't until I was forced to listen to it over and over again. Let me explain.

When I was hired at **America**, I was asked to investigate ways to expand the magazine's presence online. At the time, our Web site had no content beyond what was in the print edition. An online editor at another publication suggested we try conducting audio interviews: the hardware is inexpensive, and with the advent of the iPod, digital files are a cinch to circulate.

Three years and 100 podcasts later, the experiment has proved to be a modest success. With the aid of two microphones and a soundboard, we have recorded conversations with dozens of writers and friends of the magazine. In the case of **America's** editors, it is easy to convince them to swing by my office for a conversation. Just last week, Father Tom Massaro sat down to discuss Michael Sandel's new PBS series based on Sandel's Harvard course, "Justice." Our convenient location in midtown Manhattan has also helped. Amy Uelmen of Fordham University was happy to make the walk from her Lincoln Center office to discuss Pope Benedict XVI's "Caritas in Veritate" with Kerry Weber.

Sometimes I worry that we will run out of people to talk to. Already I have interviewed Ron Hansen, Robert Ellsberg, Therese Borchard, David Gibson, Donna Freitas, Paul Moses and Camille D'Arienzo, R.S.M. Surely, I thought, the pool of Catholic writers and thinkers runs only so deep. Even if I decide to conduct more phone interviews, which I am reluctant to do for reasons of sound quality, I will eventually exhaust the Rolodex of even my most media-savvy colleagues.

Yet I have been pleasantly surprised by the number and variety of voices available to us—a sign of the vitality of Catholic culture today. Between new books and television shows, political

debates and papal encyclicals, there has been no shortage of topics for us to consider. None of this will come as news to any avid reader of Catholic publications, but for me it has been a source of consolation.

Today's Catholic milieu may not be quite as thick as it was in the heady days after the Second Vatican Council, but reports of its demise have been greatly exaggerated. A new generation of Catholic writers and scholars is actively engaging the culture in many interesting ways. Consider Maureen O'Connell's study of Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program or Robert Sullivan's re-examination of the founding father of environmentalism in *The Thoreau You Don't Know*. Both individuals, by the way, have been guests on our podcast.

None of this is to say that our weekly interviews have caught the attention of NPR. Our podcasts sometimes generate only a modest number of hits, and young people, in particular, do not seem drawn to 20-minute interviews. Surprisingly, the format may be most attractive to our longtime readers, who enjoy hearing the voices of writers they had previously known only by their byline.

Which brings me back to the sound of my own voice. When I began editing the podcasts, I would listen in agony as I made my way through an interview. Do I really say "um" that much? Do I have to preface every question with "Now..."? Yet over time I grew accustomed to the stranger's voice and learned not to shy from playing with its pitch and tone when the microphone was on.

Of course the podcast would be incomplete without our gracious guests, and our discussions would be futile without our listeners in the ether. So if you have not already done so, tune in to the conversation. You can hear my dulcet tones at americamagazine.org/podcast.

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ON THE WEB

Peter Schineller, S.J., offers a video reflection on the **Epiphany**, and Jake Martin, S.J., reviews Jeff Bridges, right, in the film "**Crazy Heart**." Plus, from the archives, a debate on the legacy of **Vatican II**. All at americamagazine.org.



Hell on Wheels

A Brooklyn neighborhood recently witnessed the installation of a dedicated bicycle lane to protect two-wheeled commuters and recreational cyclists. Conflict ensued when the local Hasidic community complained that in addition to disobeying traffic laws, the immodestly clad cyclists were offending their religious sensibilities. City officials responded by sandblasting away the bike lane markings, only to find them repainted overnight by a guerilla public-works operation. The search for the culprits led transportation officials to YouTube, where a group of hipster Brooklyn cyclists had posted a video showing how they had used stencils, white paint and roller brushes to undo the work of municipal line-erasing crews. The trail led to two offenders, who eventually surrendered and were charged with vandalism of public property and criminal mischief.

A good dose of Solomonic wisdom is sorely needed to sort out the sound arguments offered by each side in this dispute. For the Hasidim, the religious prohibition against staring lustfully at members of the opposite sex is a solemn one. The cyclists make the strong case that this 14-block stretch of road is a unique direct corridor into Manhattan and would continue to carry bikers even without a protected bike lane.

One hopes a compromise can be worked out that advances bicycle safety and still maintains respect for the Hasidim. If successful accommodation of religion in this case can leave behind vandalism and the threat of litigation, maybe Brooklyn can serve as a beacon for peaceful coexistence in places where disputes involve matters more threatening than traffic lanes and Lycra.

Reaping, Sowing, Googling

Google, the behemoth search-engine company, has been quietly buying up and scanning millions of out-of-print books and “orphan books,” that is, books whose copyrights or owners cannot be found. Google Books hopes to bring greater access to millions (perhaps billions) of readers and usher into the public domain the works of forgotten authors. A great deal for everyone? Not all agree. In 2005, the Authors Guild and the Association of American Publishers sued Google, citing copyright law. In 2008, the company agreed to share 67 percent of the revenues generated by the project with both authors and publishers.

Now Denny Chin, a federal judge in New York, has given a green light to the agreement, though complaints are still pouring in from nonprofit groups like Consumer

Watchdog and Internet Archive and (big surprise) competitors like Amazon.com. The most salient complaint is whether the Authors Guild and the Association of American Publishers have the right to speak for orphan books and out-of-print works. A more ominous concern is the prospect of so much intellectual material in the hands of a single corporation, no matter how efficient or benign. Should Google have the right to disseminate and control the work of thousands of authors? (Wouldn't the Library of Congress be a more natural online repository for American books?) Should Google make a profit from work they neither wrote, nor edited, nor published? (Much more equitable is a venture like Project Gutenberg, a volunteer-based organization that provides “downloadable” books with expired copyrights at little or no charge to the user.) We should keep an eye on Google, which seems to be reaping where it did not sow.

A Long Way From Home

After living for 10 years with his family in upstate New York, Kevin learned he was being deported. An undocumented migrant, he was taken to a detention center in New York City, from which he worked to gather evidence and legal assistance for his case. Then he was transferred to New Mexico. Kevin told Human Rights Watch of the difficulties this caused him. Records and evidence were not transferred; he had no local connections through which to find reliable legal counsel.

Kevin's story is not unique. In 2008 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials arrested and detained more than 375,000 undocumented immigrants, held in more than 300 detention facilities nationwide.

Unlike U.S. citizens, I.C.E. detainees do not have the right to face trial in the jurisdiction in which they were first detained. While I.C.E. must transfer some detainees to avoid overcrowding and unsafe conditions, the increasing frequency with which these transfers occur is cause for concern. Between 1999 and 2008, 1.4 million detainee transfers were processed, 53 percent of them between 2006 and 2008. The transfers separate detainees from familiar legal, financial and familial resources and too often result in confusion, isolation and even wrongful deportation.

Like Kevin, many detainees are moved to remote locations with little warning and without time to notify family members or legal counsel. Regulations regarding these transfers must be tightened and enforced. The I.C.E. must uphold the laws of the United States, but not at the cost of human rights.

Marching Into the Past

In a campaign interview last year with the columnist David Brooks, Barack Obama identified Reinhold Niebuhr as his favorite philosopher. Following the president's Nobel Prize acceptance speech on Dec. 15, many commentators noted that the speech reflected Niebuhr's Christian Realism, a political theology that stressed the inescapable power of group egoism, especially in nation states, and the need of countervailing power to check injustice in the world. Niebuhr's major works, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* and *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, were sustained arguments for realism in politics and international affairs. But he equally insisted that nations were given to self-deception about their role in the world and employed myths and rationalizations to justify their self-interest.

Indeed, another Niebuhr book, *The Irony of American History*, offered criticism of the self-deceptions, moral confusions and rationalizations of American foreign policy. Comparing American naïveté to Don Quixote's, he wrote:

Of all the "knights" of bourgeois culture, our castle is the most imposing and our horse the sleekest and most impressive. Our armor is the shiniest (if it is legitimate to compare atomic bombs with a knight's armor); and the lady of our dreams is the most opulent and desirable. The lady has been turned into "prosperity."

Niebuhr was writing of the U.S. struggle against Soviet Communism, but the lesson he drew from the Quixote analogy is eerily applicable to the challenge President Obama addressed in Oslo, the threat of jihadist terrorism. "If only we could fully understand," he warned, "that the evils against which we contend are frequently the fruit of illusions similar to our own, we might be better prepared to save a vast uncommitted world, particularly in Asia...from being engulfed by a noxious creed."

In a cold war spirit, the president stood up for the idealistic use of power. "Terrible wars have been fought and atrocities committed," the president told his audience. "The ideals of liberty and self-determination, equality and the rule of law have haltingly advanced.... It is a legacy for which my own country is rightfully proud." Later he declared, "The United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of its citizens and the force of its arms."

There is much in the historic record, especially about World War II and NATO, that provides reason to be proud. In *Irony*, however, Niebuhr warned against national self-congratulation. "It is characteristic of human nature," he wrote, "that it has no possibility of exercising power without running the danger of overestimating the purity of the wisdom which directs it." He would not have been surprised that the two wars since Korea in which the most American blood was shed—Vietnam and Iraq—went unmentioned in the speech.

While President Obama spoke in Oslo before an "Old Europe" audience, with pacifist and internationalist leanings, and invoked the memory of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Pope John Paul II, his speech provided ample reason to believe that his first concern was to placate American critics who quarrel with his talk-first diplomacy and an internationalism that is warmly welcomed overseas.

The Nobel speech was above all an apology for war as a tool for peace. "We will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetime," the president said. "There will be times when nations—acting individually or in concert—will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified." It was the proclamation of a doctrine right out of the classics of Christian Realism. But as a political philosophy for the 21st century, it was a march backward into cold war history, when the just war was the coin of the realm and "the imperatives of a just peace" were hardly considered.

Developments in international affairs since Niebuhr's death in 1971 were clustered like an afterthought at the end of the address: accountability to the laws of armed conflict, the design of smart sanctions, nuclear nonproliferation, the promotion of human rights and socioeconomic development. Other recent developments that might have benefited from a boost on the Nobel platform went unmentioned: nonviolent people's revolutions, public apologies for national offenses—like President Clinton's to Rwanda—national reconciliation processes, professional peacebuilding, trials for tyrants and the International Criminal Court. The president was right as far as he went. There is sometimes a place for force in righting injustice. But in Oslo he lost an opportunity to lend the lustre of the peace prize to constructive alternatives to war.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

THE ECONOMY

Financial Crisis Clear to Catholic Charities USA Agencies

On the eve of its 100th anniversary, Catholic Charities USA is facing an array of new challenges brought on by the prolonged economic recession. In its latest nationwide survey, Catholic Charities USA reports a dramatic increase in the demand for food, counseling and rent and mortgage services. Coupled with a decline in state and federal funding, the organization finds itself confronting unique demands at a critical juncture in its history.

“At the very time when [the agencies’] needs are greatest, some of their resources are drying up,” said the Rev. Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA, in an interview with **America**.

The driving force behind the increased demand is the loss of jobs, Snyder said, noting not only the high unemployment in urban areas like Detroit but also the diminishing number of jobs in rural areas. “Rural areas frequently get forgotten because there really aren’t many people out there standing up as their spokesperson,” he said.

Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada, for example, has seen a 100 percent increase in clients at their food bank. At the Catholic Charities of Central Texas, the food pantry fed more people in October 2009 than in any other month in its history: 719 households, or 2,637 people.

The survey also indicated that:

- 70 percent of agencies saw an increase in demand for food stamps;
- 85 percent reported increased requests for rent or mortgage assistance;
- 42 percent saw an increase in demand for counseling and mental health services.

The survey is based on responses from 74 Catholic Charities agencies from around the country and covers the third quarter of 2009. Catholic Charities began compiling the data at the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008 because, Snyder said, “someone needed to chronicle what’s actually going on in the local communities.”

Father Snyder emphasized that while U.S. communities sometimes face unique, localized challenges, local or state agencies are not equipped to handle major social problems on their own. Assistance from the federal gov-

ernment is key to economic recovery. “They are the only ones with adequate resources to have a huge impact,” Snyder said.

Catholic Charities USA agencies receive significant assistance from state and federal government sources. The relationship between the three entities has been the subject of recent controversy. Last month Archbishop Donald Wuerl of Washington, D.C., threatened to sever longstanding social service agreements between the city and local Catholic Charities if the council passed a bill that would force private agencies receiving public funds to provide benefits for same-sex partners. The bill has since passed, but the archdiocese has nonetheless pledged to continue services.

Despite such events, Father Snyder stressed that the relationship between the government and Catholic



Preparing a food distribution at a Catholic Charities pantry in South Holland, Ill.

Charities has been a fruitful one. He noted that the first nonprofit agency to receive a grant from the federal government was the Little Sisters of the Poor in Washington, D.C., in 1872. “From the beginning of this country, Catholic Charities and the Catholic Church have worked within the political system to further the values that we have,” Snyder said. “We’ve always had an agreement that the government would respect the parameters of our faith,” he added. Yet as legislators redefine civil liberties, a conflict with Catholic institutions may be inevitable.

“What we have to do here is see if there’s common ground,” Snyder said, “and if there’s not, then Catholic Charities will have to pull away” from certain government contracts.

To hear a recording of the interview with Father Snyder, visit americamagazine.org/podcast.



ROME

Protecting Creation a New Path to Peace

In his message for the World Day of Peace on Jan. 1, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI issued a global call to action: “If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation.”

In this annual address from the Vatican, Pope Benedict said responding to the current ecological crisis was every person’s responsibility. Government policies, the activity of multinational corporations and the day-to-day behavior of individuals all have an impact on the environment, the pope said. While the future of the world hangs in the balance because of what people are doing today, the negative

effects of pollution and environmental exploitation already can be seen, he said. “Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions?” Pope Benedict asked.

Pope Benedict noted that threats to global peace arise just as often from misuse of the earth’s resources as from man’s inhumanity to man. “Can we disregard the growing phenomenon of ‘environmental refugees,’ people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it? Can we remain impassive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources?”

The church’s commitment to protecting the environment flows from a religious duty “to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the creator, meant for everyone, and above all to save mankind from the danger of self-destruction,” Pope Benedict said. He added that responding appropriately to the ecological crisis of our times would help address the personal spiritual and moral crises that propel over-consumption and indifference. “It is becoming more and more evident that the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle and the prevailing models of consumption and production, which are often unsustainable from a social, environmental and even economic point of view,” the pope said.

Pope Benedict challenged global leaders to re-evaluate long-held beliefs about the role of economic development. He called for “a pro-

found, long-term review of our model of development, one which would take into consideration the meaning of the economy and its goals with an eye to correcting its malfunctions and misapplications.” Pope Benedict seemed to appreciate the global environmental crisis as an opportunity to promote solidarity and address industrialized society’s sinful consumption compulsion. “The ecological problem must be dealt with not only because of the chilling prospects of environmental degradation on the horizon; the real motivation must be the quest for authentic worldwide solidarity inspired by the values of charity, justice and the common good,” Pope Benedict said.

The pope also noted the need for an “inter-generational solidarity.” The environmental crisis, he said, must be met with a universal sense of responsibility not only to people living in other parts of the world but also to generations who have not yet been born. “Natural resources should be used in such a way that immediate benefits do not have a negative impact on living creatures, human and not, present and future; that the protection of private property does not conflict with the universal destination of goods; that human activity does not compromise the fruitfulness of the earth, for the benefit of people now and in the future.”



A coal-burning power station at night in Xiangfan, in China's Hubei Province

Opening School Doors To Hispanics

A campaign launched on Dec. 12 to enroll one million Hispanic students in Catholic schools by 2020 and the study that prompted it are “a challenge to the church to get the word out and spread the good news in the Hispanic community,” said Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Curry of Los Angeles, head of the Committee on Catholic Education, in a statement on Dec. 15. “As in the past, Catholic schools are a gift to the Catholic immigrants to America. We rejoice in and celebrate that fact,” Bishop Curry said. The Catholic School Advantage campaign comes out of a 65-page report, “To Nurture the Soul of a Nation,” released on Dec. 12 by a task force commissioned by the University of Notre Dame. A key finding of the report showed that while more than 75 percent of Latinos in the United States are Catholic, only 3 percent of Latino children currently attend Catholic schools, while public schools across the country have seen a rapid growth in the number of Hispanic students.

Tragic Week for African Missionaries

Priests in South Africa are targets for robbers because they are believed to have money, several clerics said after a French missionary became the fourth priest to be murdered in the country during 2009. Five people, including three teenagers, have been arrested for the murder on Dec. 7 of Louis Blondel, 70, a priest of the Missionaries of Africa, in Diepsloot in the Archdiocese of Pretoria. The robbers, who made off with less than \$10 and a few possessions, entered through a small window and shot Father Blondel

NEWS BRIEFS

Bishop **Donal Murray of Limerick** resigned on Dec. 17 over his handling of clerical sexual abuse when he served in the Dublin Archdiocese. + The convicted killer of Sister **Dorothy Stang**, a missionary to Brazil from the United States, withdrew his request for a new trial on Dec. 9, hours before he was expected to appear before the courts in the northern Brazilian city of Belem. + Germany’s Catholic Church reported on Nov. 30 a continuing **decline in priestly vocations**, with 25 percent fewer seminarians than five years ago. + More than 500 people have filed **claims of abuse** against the Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus before the filing deadline of Nov. 30 set because of the province’s Chapter 11 bankruptcy. + Thirteen human **embryonic stem-cell** lines have been approved for use in federally funded research and approval of more lines is expected, the head of the National Institutes of Health announced on Dec. 2. + On Dec. 19 Pope Benedict XVI formally recognized the miracle needed for the canonization of Australia’s Blessed Mary MacKillop and **advanced the causes** of Pope John Paul II and Pope Pius XII, declaring that both had lived lives of “heroic virtues.”



Dorothy Stang

when he opened his bedroom door. Blondel’s murder was part of a violent week for Catholic clerics and religious in Africa, tragically accompanied by the killing of the Rev. Daneil Cizimya Nakamaga, 51, and Sister Denise Kahambu in separate attacks near Bukavu, Congo, and the murder on Dec. 11 of Jeremiah Roche, 68, an Irish priest, at his home in Kericho, Kenya.

Latino Youth Find Hope and Danger

A major study of the values, circumstances and aspirations of Latino youth paints a portrait of optimism and enthusiasm in the face of significant struggles, including inadequate education, problems with their immigration status and high rates of poverty. The study by the Pew Hispanic Center released on Dec. 11 highlights

many similarities between the way previous generations of immigrants and recent Latino immigrants and their children become a part of American society. And it notes that Hispanic cultural traditions of close family ties, religious faith and hard work remain strong even several generations after a family resettles in the United States. In the report, “Between Two Worlds: How Young Latinos Come of Age in America,” ties to church were singled out as a particularly strong influence in helping young Latinos avoid getting involved with gangs. The report notes one pervasive problem faced by Latino youths: a greater likelihood than other teen demographic groups of becoming involved with weapons, fights and gangs, leading to jail or prison time.

From CNS and other sources.



Shelter From the Storms

How quickly things change. First, Jesus' birth is celebrated by the Magi and angels. Then the celebration is cut short, as Christ and his family become refugees, fleeing the violence of a brutal dictator in the middle of the night with little more than the clothes on their backs.

I can relate to these Scriptures. We celebrated our first baby's birth a few years ago, only to have the celebration cut short by a hurricane. The doctors said we could not travel with our five-pound, premature baby for more than an hour, as her lungs might collapse during the trip. Yet the authorities urged evacuation.

What do you take when you must grab a few items and quickly flee? This is the question posed in "the backpack exercise," a moving educational reflection created by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to mark this week's National Migration Week (Jan. 3-9). But for people escaping danger, it is not an exercise. The Holy Family had a donkey; we had a used Toyota that at first refused to start. We headed out with some diapers, clothes and little else, trying to escape the worst of the storm damage.

Jesus was an old-style refugee, fitting the current international law definitions of someone fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, who is outside the country of his nationality and unable to return. Existing refugee laws

and organizations, including the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, were created to serve people like these.

Environmental refugees are the new refugee challenge. Our laws and institutions do not recognize them, yet because of global climate change, their numbers are growing quickly. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that we may face 150 million environmental refugees by 2050; U.N.H.C.R. warns of 250 million. That would be four to six times the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (42 million combined) we struggle to serve now.

The problem is all too real. The U.N. University's Institute for Environment and Human Security estimates there are already more environmental refugees than political refugees: 50 million, compared with 15 million traditional refugees. Island countries like the Republic of Kiribati, the Maldives, Tuvalu and parts of Bangladesh and Papua New Guinea are disappearing and are already relocating their people. Populous countries like India and Indonesia are vulnerable. The world's poorest people bear most of the cost of climate change, though they contribute least to the problem. Of the 26 countries deemed by most observers to be the most vulnerable to climate change impacts, 23 are in Africa. The U.N. high commissioner for refugees, Antonio Guterres, notes that from Sudan to Rwanda the combined impact of conflict, environmental and economic factors challenges our exist-

ing categories for refugees.

Maryanne Loughry, R.S.M., associate director of Jesuit Refugee Service, Australia, counsels that "protection mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that people are not left struggling to survive in ever-diminishing settings while the world debates the realities of climate change."

This week Pope Benedict XVI, "the green pope," urges us in his message for the World Day of Peace to take seriously our sacred duty to protect creation. In his encyclical "Caritas in Veritate," Pope Benedict said, "The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility toward the poor, toward future generations and toward humanity as a

The number of environmental refugees is growing quickly.

whole."

What can we do? We can consider how our actions affect the world's poor, help environmental refugees by "greening" our own behaviors, consider "who's under our carbon footprint" and take the Catholic Climate Covenant's St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor. We can support groups like the Jesuit Refugee Service and Catholic Relief Services, which help environmental refugees and work to help the world's poor better adapt to climate change. We can support congressional legislation and administrative action to reduce carbon emissions, especially measures to support the poor hurt most by climate change. And we can welcome today's holy families, forced to flee circumstances not of their making.

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE, during her sabbatical from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., is a fellow at the Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Sisters wait amid a sea of spectators for the arrival of Pope Benedict XVI to celebrate Mass at Yankee Stadium in New York City on April 20, 2008.





THE APOSTOLIC VISITATION REVIVES
SOME UNRESOLVED CONFLICTS.

Vatican II Revisited

BY FRANCINE CARDMAN

‘D^éjà vu all over again,” as Yogi Berra put it, is an apt description for the apostolic visitation of institutes of women religious in the United States that is now taking place. Many commentators have expressed puzzlement over what occasioned the visitation and why it is directed solely at sisters in the United States. The population of women religious has been declining in North America for the past 45 years; the most precipitous declines occurred decades ago. The aging of women’s religious communities is an unsurprising result of the overall drop in numbers, as is the increased strain on their financial resources. These realities are not news. So why a visitation now? Trying to find proximate causes of the Vatican’s decision is at once fascinating to observers of ecclesial politics and frustrating to proponents of a more transparent style of church governance. Putting the project into a larger historical and theological context, however, can help to situate that sense of *déjà vu*.

Much of the rhetoric and energy around the visitation seems so familiar because it is. We have seen and heard it all before—specifically in the heady and sometimes chaotic years of change and controversy immediately following the Second Vatican Council, in the debates around the revision and approval of constitutions for communities of women religious in the early 1980s, during the mid-1980s in the visitation of U.S. seminaries and a separate study of women’s religious communities by a pontifical commission headed by Archbishop John Quinn, during the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985, and during the visitation of U.S. seminaries in

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PHOTO: CNS/MIKE CRUPI

2005 that followed the crisis of sexual abuse by members of the Catholic clergy. The current visitation of women's religious communities may be unusual canonically, but it is not "new" when placed alongside these undertakings. Common to them all is that they are part of an extended and unfinished conversation that began on Dec. 8, 1965, when Pope Paul VI declared Vatican II closed. The council's work was finished, but the church's work had just begun.

The long next step was (and is still) "reception," the process by which the council's teaching would be interpreted and implemented, becoming part of the church's life and tradition. The historical study of church councils, especially ecumenical councils, of and for the whole church, shows that reception is seldom simple or straightforward. Vatican II is no exception. The visitation of women's religious communities is enmeshed in the unsettled questions about the interpretation of the council. And theological debate and ecclesiastical politics have heated up in recent years around this very issue, raising questions about Catholic identity and the legacy of Vatican II that affect us all.

What Happened at Vatican II?

If it seems far-fetched to place the visitation in this seemingly abstruse context, consider an article in *L'Osservatore Romano* (1/28/09). Entitled "From Past to Present: Religious Life Before and After Vatican II," it is a slightly revised version of an address given by Cardinal Franc Rodé, prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, at a conference on apostolic religious life the previous fall at Stonehill College in Massachusetts. The speech reveals some of the presuppositions and the implicit agenda of the visitation, which is under the direction of his office.

Cardinal Rodé characterizes the decades since Vatican II as a period in which "the church has undergone one of her greatest crises of all times," and he notes that "the dramatic situation of consecrated life has not been marginal to this state of affairs." He attributes what he considers the sorry state of religious life to inauthentic renewal based on a profoundly misguided interpretation of Vatican II. Labeling this mistaken approach a "hermeneutics of discontinuity and rupture," the cardinal decries the "pseudo-aggiornamento" that followed, which he describes as centered on humankind rather than on God, a turn toward "naturalism" and away from "the supernatural." As a corrective he proposes a "hermeneutics of continuity and reform" that is "in

the true spirit of the council." That true spirit is to be found and followed, he concludes, in "what John Paul II taught us yesterday and what Benedict is teaching us today."

That there are serious, ongoing differences about the meaning of the council is not surprising. Some of the same interpretive issues have played out in the pages of this magazine in exchanges between two Jesuit scholars, John W. O'Malley, a church historian, and the late Cardinal Avery Dulles, a systematic theologian. In its most basic form, what is at issue is change: Did anything happen at Vatican II that changed the way the church thinks, speaks and acts? Father O'Malley argues that something new did happen, that the council taught by its words and its own actions a different

way of being church. In order to understand the council, he suggests, it is necessary to acknowledge and attend to its discontinuities as well as to its continuities with church tradition and to learn from both. Cardinal Dulles argues that

The visitation of women's religious communities is enmeshed in the unsettled questions about the interpretation of the council.

although there were some elements of change in the council's work and style, there were no substantive changes in teaching. What change there was must be understood from the perspective of, and subordinated to, an essential continuity with the church's tradition. In that sense, nothing new happened at the council; contrary claims reflect a myth rather than the reality of Vatican II. In Cardinal Rodé's terms, Father O'Malley's interpretation would exemplify a "hermeneutics of discontinuity and rupture," Cardinal Dulles's a "hermeneutics of continuity and reform." Both characterizations are unfair.

These interpretive differences are now being replayed in relation to the visitation. The question of change underlies Cardinal Rodé's criticism of women's apostolic religious communities and what he considers the erroneous interpretation of Vatican II that guided them in their renewal process. A common thread links the cardinal's remarks with papal and curial efforts to establish an interpretation of the council and promote a vision of Catholic life that restores something like the pre-Vatican II church.

A developing agenda for "authentic" interpretation of the council can be discerned early in John Paul II's pontificate, when he convened an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985 for the "celebration, *verification* [my emphasis], and promotion" of Vatican II on the 20th anniversary of its closing. To that end, the papal report on the synod identified six interpretive norms for reading the council's documents, principles to which Cardinal Dulles appealed and Father O'Malley also subscribed, but with qualifications about how

these norms themselves should be interpreted and applied.

A decade later, the pope outlined his agenda for the renewal of religious life in *Vita Consecrata*, his report summing up the 1996 Synod on Consecrated Life. There Pope John Paul II makes a telling observation on the work of the recent synods: taken together, they had reconsidered (and, presumably, retrieved) a theology of “states of life”—laity, clergy, religious—that had been eclipsed by Vatican II’s vision of the church. The council had reoriented its thinking on Christian vocation by renewing an ancient theology of baptism as the foundation of all callings in the church. All the baptized share a vocation to holiness and to participation in the church’s mission. By contrast, *Vita Consecrata* returned to a pre-Vatican II focus on “the distinctive features of the states of life,” emphasizing their “specific identity” and “particular mission” in the church. Vocation is demarcated by difference rather than founded on the common calling of baptism. John Paul emphasized the need to keep the distinctions sharp and the differences in states of life visible.

Whose Tradition?

Cardinal Rodé’s agenda is attuned to this “states of life” theology. It also resonates with Benedict XVI’s nostalgia for “Christian Europe” and for the church that was so bound up with its history. Recent revision of liturgical rubrics and the return of the Tridentine Mass are products of that same longing for a past form of Catholic life. The cardinal’s outlook is congruent with these initiatives to modify if not undo many of the liturgical reforms that followed the council.

Around the time that these changes in liturgical practice were being put in place, Pope Benedict reversed Pope John Paul II’s excommunication of four bishops illicitly ordained in 1988 by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in order to continue his “traditionalist” movement in opposition to Vatican II’s liturgical reforms. In 2009, Vatican officials and representatives of the Society of St. Pius X began a dialogue on the issues separating the Lefebvrists from full communion with the church. The topics they will discuss, as listed in a Vatican press release, have much in common with the questions underlying the visitation: “the concept of tradition, the Missal of Paul VI [the post-Vatican II Roman Missal], the interpretation of Vatican II in continuity with Catholic doctrinal tradition, the themes of the unity of the church and Catholic principles of ecumenism, the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions, and religious freedom.”

It is not incidental that the visitation’s working document asks explicitly about the spiritual and liturgical life of the women’s communities and their adherence to “approved liturgical norms.” Questions about the role of nonmembers and associates in the governance of the institute, the under-

standing of religious life taught to members and prospective members and whether a community regards itself as moving toward a “new form of religious life” are strong indications of the presuppositions underlying the process and its purposes. It is telling that a question about formation programs asks if they teach Vatican II documents, as well as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and postconciliar documents. Yet in the sources noted as pertinent for each section of the visitation’s questionnaire, there is no reference either to Scripture, the community’s own constitutions and customs, the Vatican II documents or the *Catechism*. Only “the most recent documents of the Church concerning religious life” and the *Code of Canon Law* are cited. Given the high level of authority traditionally attached to conciliar texts, it is a striking reversal to subordinate the council to far less authoritative later pronouncements.

To see the visitation in the ecclesial context of the reception of Vatican II does not fully explain its origins and goals, but it complicates an understanding of what might be at stake in this undertaking and of the way in which women’s religious communities respond to it. What happens during and after the visitation should be of concern for all in the church—observers and participants. One contribution observers and commentators on the process can make as it unfolds is to be cognizant of these underlying issues and the longer “backstory” they represent. Another is not to buy (or slip) into the false dichotomies of “traditional” and “nontraditional” religious life so prevalent in the media’s discussion of the visitation. Both those communities frequently cited as examples of “traditional” religious life and those characterized as in some way “nontraditional” (most communities associated with Leadership Conference of Women Religious, which represents 95 percent of U.S. sisters) have legitimate claims to stand in the long and diverse tradition of authentic, apostolic communities of women religious.

It is not possible here to do more than note the many forms of women’s religious life as it has developed—and continues to develop—from the High Middle Ages to the present. Anchoring one end of the historical and institutional spectrum are cloistered communities of nuns whose way of life centers chiefly on contemplation and communal liturgical prayer. They are among the earliest forms of religious life for women, reaching back at least to the fourth century. At the other end are congregations, societies and institutes of sisters engaged in active, apostolic service, particularly in education, hospitals and care of the poor. They emerged in the urban environments of the 12th century at the same time as new orders of religious men (mendicant friars like the Franciscans or Dominicans) who were seeking to follow an apostolic form of life. In between have been

ON THE WEB

Avery Dulles, S.J., and
John W. O’Malley, S.J., on the
legacy of Vatican II.
americamagazine.org/pages

myriad lay women's movements, pious associations, small communities without vows or ecclesiastical supervision and third orders. They are the matrix from which new cloistered and apostolic communities have commonly arisen.

Creativity and Resistance

Two features of these developments are central to understanding the questions of tradition and change implicit and explicit in the current visitation. The first is the creativity, persistence and patience with which women religious have sought ways of life that allow them to express their commitment to the Gospel in changing historical circumstances. The second is the resistance encountered by each new apostolic community and founder as they sought ecclesiastical approval for their particular charisms. Often this resistance was simply to change itself. At other times it was due to fear that new forms of women's religious life were not enough like the older ones to be recognizable, or were too much like lay women's lives to be easily distinguished from them, blurring distinctions among states of life. Nearly always there were differences relating to gender in the way the hierarchy regarded new communities of men and women.

Both the difficulty and the diversity are part of the history of women's religious life. This history is the heritage of all apostolic communities of women religious, not only those that closely resemble cloistered communities or engage in more church-related ministries. There is not one way of being "traditional" but many. The church has room for and need of many expressions of apostolic religious life in order to express fully its catholicity and effectively embody its mission.

Both difficulty and diversity are part of the history of women's religious life.

Over the past 40 years women's religious communities have embraced a consistent and, as they have discerned it through prayer and practice, faithful style of renewing their historical charisms and embodying the teachings of Vatican II. They now find themselves caught in strong crosscurrents set in motion by a very different way of relating to the council and of construing both Catholic identity and apostolic religious life. Whether these conflicting currents mark the beginnings of an enduring sea change in religious life and the reception of Vatican II or are a temporary storm surge remains to be seen. But we can expect that the outcome will be important not only for women religious in the United States, but for the life and mission of the whole church. **A**



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Educating Minds and Hearts to Change The World

Conversation Peace

Practicing what we preach in resolving conflicts

BY ANN GARRIDO AND SHEILA HEEN

Imagine a typical parish. A member of the staff must be laid off because of budgetary constraints; the Girl Scouts and the athletic association have double-booked the gym; quinceañera plans do not conform to diocesan guidelines; the issue of women and ordination hangs like a cloud over a faith-sharing session; a critical agenda has been lost in cyberspace; and the board meeting implodes.

Many of us grew up with an ideal vision of church based on the Acts of the Apostles. We focus on how the early Christians laid their possessions at the feet of the apostles, and we think that they lived happily ever after—all of one mind and heart. When our own experience of church does not match this, we are tempted to think that something has gone terribly awry: How can there be conflict in a community that professes Christ? Why can't we all just get along like our ancestors in faith?

And yet the conflicts that punctuate our life together are nothing new. Indeed, the letters of Paul, written even before Acts, witness to the presence of conflict in the earliest Christian communities of Ephesus and Galatia, Jerusalem and Corinth. It turns out there was never a time in which the church was without conflict, and this is not necessarily a bad thing. Conflict can be a sign of vitality. People argue only over things they care about. Communities that claim to have no conflict are more likely to be riddled with apathy than living in perfect charity.

Granted, conflict is not the goal of our ecclesial life, and

we need not intentionally provoke it. But rather than bemoan its perennial presence, we can choose to perceive conflict as inherent in the spiritual journey and commit to confronting it well, allowing our way of living together in good times and in bad to become part of our preaching. As Paul often reminded the early Christians, at the heart of our

Gospel is one central message: through Christ the world is being reconciled to God. There is a sense of dynamism in Paul's summary. All of creation writhes in the labor of becoming what God has always dreamed it to be. Christ the head has emerged while his body is still in the process of being born. Jesus leads the way; the earth remains in an ongoing process of reconciliation. The witness that Christians can most powerfully offer the world is not that of a perfect people, but of a people always fully engaged in the reconciliation experience.

It follows that exercises in reconciliation should be considered essential Christian practices—ways of fully collaborating with God in the ongoing work of creation. As Christians, we are expected not just to theorize about prayer, but to pray. We are expected not just to consent to the idea of works of mercy, but to show mercy. Reconciliation cannot

be something we advocate from a distance. We must learn how to engage in it.

This is no easy task, but the fields of conflict resolution and negotiation can be partners to Christian communities in this regard. Resources developed in the fields of law and business offer tangible, easily applicable ways of becoming a reconciling people. When motivated by faith, seven practices from these fields have the potential to become spiritual disciplines in which the Christian vocation to reconciliation is made real.



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1. Avoid triangulation.

"If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5:23-24).

When we are frustrated or hurt by others, it is easier to talk about them than to them. As a general rule in Christian conflict, if two people are speaking negatively about a third, the third has a right to be present. Catholic social teaching emphasizes the principle of subsidiarity—decisions should be made at the lowest effective level possible by the persons most affected by those decisions. Applied to conflict management, that means conflict should be handled by the persons directly involved in the conflict. Parents who are upset with a teacher should be challenged to talk to the teacher before going to a principal. Parishioners angered by a pastor's preaching should go to the pastor before writing to the bishop.

2. Distinguish between facts and interpretations.

"Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?...You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye" (Lk 6:41-42).

We often talk about conflicts as if they were simple factual disputes with clear and obvious answers. But most disputes are not about facts. Everyone agrees that the board was lacking information in advance of the meeting. What we disagree about is whether it was absolutely essential to possess the information in advance, who is responsible for the information being unavailable and whether the meeting should proceed without it. These are interpretations and judgments that are based on assumptions, past experiences, expectations and self-serving biases. We notice and feel strongly about things that reflect on us. We will give less credit to things that are unfamiliar or do not affect us. So if my pet project is not affected by the missing information, I tend to think we should proceed and that you are overreacting in hysteria over a little lost paperwork. If my project is jeopardized by the oversight, I am scandalized by the unprofessional manner in which this organization is run.

We always have a partial picture of any given situation, and we emphasize both meanings of partial—our view is

both incomplete and biased. We need to understand others' interpretations to see the whole picture. We need one another to "reconcile" a more complete understanding.

3. Practice passionate—and compassionate—curiosity.

Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "[Lord,] Son of David, have pity on us!"...Jesus stopped and called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" They answered him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." Moved with pity, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him (Mt 20:30-34).

Understanding another's perspective requires humility and becoming curious about the experience of others. What

information does the other have that I might not have? What leads them to think that this is important or unjust or plain wrong? What are they seeing that I am not seeing? The only way that we find the answers to these questions is to ask the other person directly—not rhetorically, but genuinely wanting to understand their perspective and reasoning: It matters to me that I understand you more fully.

4. Let grace and compassion transform the emotions.

I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace (Eph 4:1-3).

The practice of curiosity, however, cannot end with frank questioning. Conflict is difficult because by its very nature it involves human emotion, generally emotions that we would prefer not to feel: anger, frustration, disappointment, sadness, hurt. As persons who profess Christ, we would like to think of ourselves as loving, joyful, serene, generous, faithful, forgiving. Experiencing unpleasant emotions or hearing that we might be the cause of others' unpleasant emotions threatens the identity that we have built up for ourselves, making us fearful that we are less than the persons we would like to be. Nevertheless, in order for difficult conversations to be fruitful conversations, we have to be curious about the emotions involved and willing to hear how the other feels even when it makes us uncomfortable. We will need to have compassion for ourselves and for the other, recognizing we are all human and struggling.

When our own experience of church does not match up, we are tempted to think that something has gone terribly awry: How can there be conflict in a community that professes Christ?

5. Engage the internal voice.

Know this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God (Jas 1:19-20).

The other people in our conflicts are in many cases not entirely “with us” in our journey toward compassion and grace. They are still feeling aggravated or impatient or overlooked. Just to make things especially tricky, they are seldom likely to be direct about those feelings. Asked to move the date of a scheduled event, the scout leader might say, “Sure, that’s fine,” when she’s really thinking, “What a hassle! I’ll never volunteer for this parish again.”

Often we have to draw out the other persons’ internal voice, to give them permission to be candid about their thoughts and feelings. But “It doesn’t sound like that’s fine” may be heard as a challenge or accusation. An empathetic, “I know this isn’t the first time, and it must be frustrating” encourages a more frank exchange. In the moment, it may mean a barrage of pent-up aggravation. But if we can hold their frustration and our compassion in the situation, we transform their internal dialogue and perhaps our own. Driving home, the scout leader is more likely to be thinking, “That athletic director seems to really ‘get’ the problem. I hope we can work something out together. It can’t be easy for him either....”

6. Good intentions, bad impact.

“Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you” (Mt 7:1-2).

Often when we complain to each other about someone else, we start with “the kind of person he is”: “You know how she is—always has to control everything” or “He’s just on a power trip” or “I just don’t think they care.” We assume they have bad intentions and bad character. Yet when we are accused of micromanaging or carelessness, we indignantly defend our good intentions: We just want to do the right thing.

Remembering that most conflicts inside communities result from well-intentioned people having unintended bad impacts on each other can help us raise issues without raising defensiveness: “I’m guessing you weren’t aware of the guidelines for quinceañera celebrations; here’s the problem I’m worried about; let’s figure out how to make it work.”

7. Be accountable for your personal contribution to the problem.

After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” Simon said in reply,

“Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.” When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Lk 5:4-9).


Adam and Eve pointed blaming fingers in their first conflict with God in the garden. Our tendency to want to assign blame is part of our sinful condition. If we are to transform that impulse into something healing and useful, it is through seeing conflict as a result of joint contributions between us. Almost every problematic situation is the result of multiple contributions—things we each did or failed to do—and also factors that are beyond either one of us. Being willing to be accountable for our part of the problem

models contrition and leads the way to reconciliation. Starting with, “I wish I had raised this earlier” or, “Looking back, there are certainly some things I wish I’d done differently” starts us down a solution-oriented conversation and invites grace into our hearts.

Difficult conversations are by their very nature risky undertakings. In the midst of conflict, I have little curiosity about your view. In fact, I probably feel contemptuous of it as a result of feeling frustrated, disappointed or misunderstood. And learning more about your view may make me more angry, uncomfortable or hurt, so I’m anxious rather than excited at the prospect. And what if I listen to you, only to have my own views dismissed or ridiculed?

Why take the risk?

Because Jesus took the risk. Jesus devoted a great deal of his teaching to themes surrounding conflict: challenge, compassion, confrontation and the importance of repeated forgiveness. But he also spent a great deal of his life modeling those teachings with his own followers. In his ministry, we find Jesus frequently initiating conversations that he surely knew would spark disagreement or discomfort in his listeners. Some of those conversations led to his death. But after his resurrection, we find Jesus continuing these conversations in a most personal way with the very people who had abandoned and denied him. Jesus not only spoke about a new age of reconciliation; he practiced it in his own relationships. Although his engagements were often difficult, he demonstrated that good, hard conversations have the potential to increase insight into the character of God and the nature of God’s reign.

In conflict we have the opportunity to enjoy increased insight and understanding, an opportunity to participate in the reconciling of our world to God. 

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Fraternal Orders

Good counsel for young clergy from their senior brothers

BY DAVID A. RUBINO

They stand erect, these silent memorials to past servants. Some gather dust, while others glisten in the bright morning sun. On close inspection, handprints are visible in the rubber molding of the walkers and scratches from collisions with the walls of the Bishop Michael J. Murphy Residence for Retired Priests in Erie, Pa. Forged from aluminum and rubber, these artifacts are the leftover wheelchairs, walkers, canes and electric scooters of retired members of the clergy who have died.

Seeing these castoffs in the basement, I wondered what advice these veterans might have offered the young men who now serve in their place. So I gathered from among their retired brothers here a modest amount of “advice for young clergy” in a quarrelsome church.

Six Suggestions

1. *Be yourself.* Ready to explode as he struggles to set up voice mail, a gentle cleric nearing the point of cellphone rage advises, “Forget everything they taught you in the seminary. Those chaps never lived a day in a parish or had to struggle to make a payroll. What do they know about asphalt roofs, boilers and helping families when Dad is out of work?”

Clearly, seminary teaching has evolved from lectures and note-taking to better teaching and learning experiences coupled with assessment. But

however improved the teaching process may be, the newly ordained remain just that: newly ordained. As with new university faculty members, newly ordained clergy arrive at their job assignment without experiential understanding of the dynamics of a full-time job and without a tested view of how they are perceived as priests by others. Newly ordained are new to the job of priest; they are unseasoned transformational agents of the church.

When a man’s role changes from that of transitional deacon to priest, the perceptions of the people shift dramatically. They see him as moving from student to leader. Seminaries may teach about this perceptual shift, but the role change must be experienced to be understood.

In a family business, for example, the most dangerous transition is the transfer from the founding parent to the inheriting children. Even when the children know the business, the expectations of employees and outsiders rise significantly once the founder’s children assume the mantle of leadership. Often they fail. Many second-generation executives fail because they try to do too much too quickly in order to prove themselves. They try to define themselves by outdoing their parents rather than doing what is expected of them.

The advice here is to be yourself. Observe before you act. Listen before you speak. Let the reality of the priesthood permeate the fabric of your being as you adjust to the complicated role of priest. Learn the history of wherever you are planted. Disregard some of the

minutiae you were taught in the protective tower of the seminary, where life was more structured.

Your parishioners are good teachers, having seen priests come and go over the years. And many of these good people will be in the parish long after you have left it. Learn from them and with them. Let them see your real flesh. Otherwise, your efforts to prove yourself rather than be yourself may obliterate the “real you” from your priesthood.

2. *Practice sacrificing self.* “Welcome home. I’ll take care of it,” was the standard greeting of the concierge at the retirement residence, himself a retired priest, to every new resident upon arrival. Most likely he was just trying to eradicate the memories of the greetings he received on his first assignment. Ordained over five decades before, this priest still nervously recalled a scowling pastor’s fraternal salutation: “I told the bishop I didn’t want to feed a resident guy. I wanted a full-time guy that works for food and me. Your room’s up the stairs to the right.” The welcome wagon must have been in the shop that day.

The unsolicited advice in this case is to practice becoming a better person and a better priest by sacrificing your self, as well as those petty things attached to your self-definition. Priestly ministry demands it. As a young priest the concierge at the retirement home prayed for the angel of death to visit the pastor quickly. But he also learned to surrender himself to work with the pastor, balancing his own needs against the pastor’s for the

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good of the parishioners. This priest learned how to serve others, not self—how to be gracious and hospitable and kind. He might have become bitter. Instead, he learned well a lesson that has framed his priestly life to this day.

3. *Be easy on the folks.* A spicy lasagna dinner in the retirement home sprinkled with a spicy agenda of discussion topics forced one priest to look for Rolands. The debate had heated up: What happened to mortal sin, Teddy Roosevelt and Monsignor's political philosophy? Maybe he was "a better Democrat than he was a Catholic." Calmer after dinner, this priest advised his juniors: "Know you are naïve. Do no harm. The young guys are on a sacramental quest to root out mortal sin. Be easy on the folks."

It is not a sin to be naïve. The sooner young clergy realize they will never know it all (which is perfectly acceptable), the better off they will be. The clerical quest to be the next pastor or vicar of whatever office the chancery needs to reorganize can wait at least one year.

The unsolicited advice: Smile and take it easy. People should not be harshly judged. Tenderly wait on your people and be present to them. The signs of these times indicate that a fundamental change is taking place in American civic and religious life. The elderly are frightened; Generations X and Y seem to have little comprehension of civic engagement and social connectedness (other than the virtual community). Mix urbanism with a secular age that is part of our conscious fabric (as Charles Taylor reminds us), and we become a confused people and a church struggling to find our way in a radically different time.

So be easy on the folks. Learn with them about the contemporary age with its diversity of people, ideas and choices. As you offer them the Eucharist,

gaze at their receptive hands—weathered, soiled and swollen, painfully arthritic, yet present to receive the Lord. Smile and be easy. They need a pastor, not a judge. Walk with them and search with them. Support and guide them.

4. *Speak with many tongues.* This



priest, known as Reverend Doctor, never really spoke much. Having spent most of his ministry as a teacher, he was concerned about clear communication with the new generation: "They are good kids but brazen. Not like before. Not shy about speaking their minds. I would never have spoken out to my teachers when I was their age."

Adding to the communications confusion of this new generation is the curtain call of the children of the World War II vets and Rosie the Riveter—the baby boomers. They are leaving the stage costumed as the wicked establishment they once deplored, leaving behind a colorful world of choices. They are leaving their legacy and what is left of their money to a new generation, called the millennials.

This group is smaller than the boomers and has been overshadowed

by them. For the millennials, technology rules every phase of their lives. They settle down later in life because of hectic work schedules, are a generation of tinkerers concerning religion and reach out to whatever/whoever welcomes them on their terms.

Who will form the millennials in the faith? Who will speak to them in the language they use, employing their patterns of thought? Who will speak to the exiting boomers and the rest of the population?

The unsolicited advice is to speak in many tongues as you proclaim the Gospel. Proclaim a Gospel that is understandable to generations raised and formed by immigrant parents as well as by technology. Be knowledgeable about the diversity of people and the communication patterns they use. Learn to use the communication tools of the age. The choice to ignore the impact of diversity, communication patterns and communication tools will lessen your ability to preach the Gospel.

5. *Laugh with your elders, not at them.* A happily retired priest poignantly opined: "The new guys give us no respect as priests of Vatican II. They think we led the church astray, and they will never forgive us for it."

There have been many changes since the 1960s. Many retired priests led the local changes and felt the pain of those changes. In worship, parish governance and church renovation, these men struggled with angry parishioners to open the windows and share responsibility with all God's people.

As a direct result, the senior members of the priesthood now feel distanced from their junior colleagues. Convinced that Vatican II bettered the church, they hope the younger clergy will hold them in respect and admiration. But confusion and feelings of rejection cloud the senior clergy's

interactions with young priests.

The unsolicited advice here is to respect the elder clergy, because they deserve it. They have much to teach, for history and experiences are master-teachers. Laughing with them, rather than at them is not a high price to pay. It is what it costs to share time with men who have given a life of service to the Lord. It is as advisable as it is virtuous.


6. *Dance with your failures.* Learn from failures on both a cognitive and a spiritual level. Think about your failures, then forget them. Do they spring from poor planning, tight timelines in the schedule, too much trust in a core of power-hungry volunteers or simply from bad ideas? Learning from failed experiences can teach a person how to juggle the complex interactions of personalities that are part of leadership in ministry. These can also teach the proper ordering of ministry's myriad tasks.

Do your failures have their roots in

personal disasters? Did you run off the priestly path because you lost your way, were blinded by pride or were plain stubborn and stupid? Did you fail because you viewed yourself as more important than anyone or anything else? Did the satisfaction of erecting your edifice distract you from looking into the unfocused eyes of grieving spouses or holding hands with lonely children? Did loneliness seek a temporary companion in alcohol or drugs acquired over the Internet? It helps to learn from failures by facing them with a spiritual guide. In guided dialogue we learn we are not alone. We are disciples on the road. We fall, get up, walk on and serve.

In *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, Ronald Rolheiser writes of a "dark memory," a myth that "before birth, each soul is kissed by God and proceeds through life recalling in some dark way that

kiss, and measuring everything in relation to that original sweetness." God has kissed you and the people in your ministry with a sweet kiss. When they fail at balancing jobs, family and limited incomes, caring for elderly parents and their own family needs, they search for that original, tranquil kiss of the Lord.

Minister to that sweet kiss as you find it within yourself, and you will not only serve your people. You will bond with them through sharing your search, which is the deepest part of yourself. At that point your journey will intersect with the journey of your people, and you will both discover the peaceful tranquility of that sweet elusive kiss of the Lord. And you will dance through life together with the Lord, because God's people will know the deepest part of you—with the help of a little unsolicited advice from your senior brothers in ministry. *Ad multos annos.* 

POETRY CONTEST

Poems are being accepted for the 2010 Foley Poetry Award

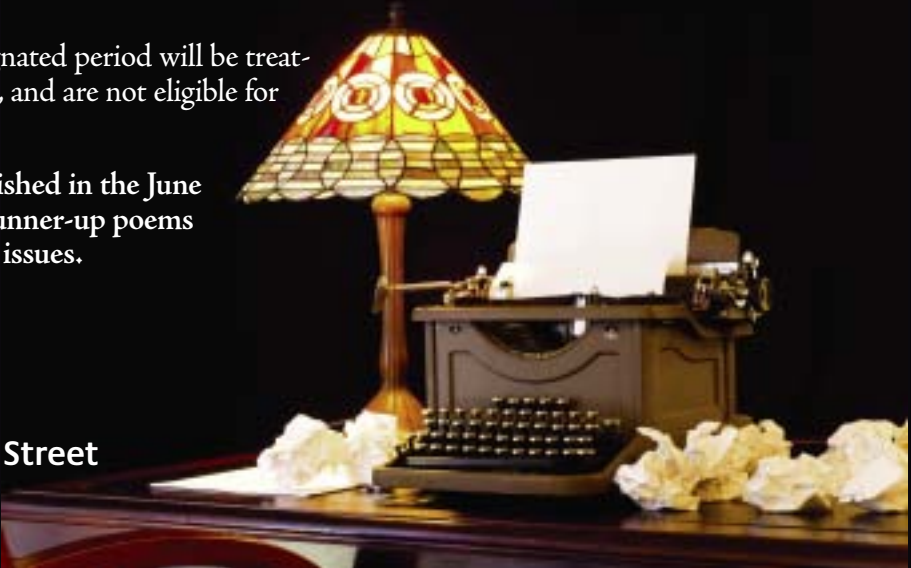
Each entrant is asked to submit only one typed, unpublished poem of 30 lines or fewer that is not under consideration elsewhere. Include contact information on the same page as the poem. Poems will not be returned. Please do not submit poems by e-mail or fax. Submissions must be postmarked between Jan. 1 and March 31.

Poems received outside the designated period will be treated as regular poetry submissions, and are not eligible for the prize.

The winning poem will be published in the June 7-14 issue of *America*. Three runner-up poems will be published in subsequent issues.

Cash prize: \$1,000.

Send poems to:
Foley Poetry Contest
America, 106 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019



BOOKS & CULTURE

FILM | RICHARD A. BLAKE

DEAD END

John Hillcoat's 'The Road'

Two or three weeks into a study of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in graduate school, I slowly began to appreciate that the pilgrimage itself held the key to the narrative. As these wonderful characters travel from the Tabard Inn to Canterbury cathedral, each telling a story to pass the time, they reveal more of the human condition, and thus more about each of us as we travel from our earthly dwelling place to heaven. It's a great trip, with fascinating companions, a few hearty laughs—

many at our own expense—and, of course, the occasional moment of tragedy to remind us of the seriousness of our journey.

This background served quite well when some years later I taught a class on "La Strada," Federico Fellini's masterpiece of 1954. As was the case with Chaucer's great work, it was easy to get lost in the characters, the waiflike Gelsomina (Giulietta Masina) and her brutish antagonist, the circus strongman Zampanò (Anthony Quinn), and forget that the title of the film was

"The Road," a clear indication of the importance of that image. The two misfits ride a battered motorbike and trailer along the back roads of postwar Italy in search of meaning, love and, ultimately, redemption. The road of life has much to teach them. Gelsomina learns quickly; Zampanò resists until the very end.

The Road, a new American film based on the novel by Cormac McCarthy, rarely allows its characters to learn much about anything. As a journey film, it is oddly static. The two main characters, the Man (Viggo Mortensen) and the Boy (Kodi Smit-McPhee), maintain their stoic demeanor while all sorts of terrible things go on around them. The old "indomitable human spirit" theme

Viggo Mortensen, right, and Kodi Smit-McPhee in "The Road."



pushes the boundaries of cliché unless it has substantial characters and a credible conflict, which this film does not. It reduces the journey of life to two hours of unrelieved misery, without the ribaldry of the *Wife of Bath* or the endearing innocence of *Gelsomina*.

Drones

The dictionary names drones
“male bees making no honey”
or “parasitic loafers”

Reapers and Predators
eleven million dollars each
an altogether grim business

“unmanned”
good try, but it wouldn’t
happen without one of us

250 pairs of “eyes in the sky”
pilots in Nevada
bombing civilians in Iraq

“engaging insurgents
successfully” taking them out
and making it home in time for dinner

“enlarging the battlefield”
when you back off far enough
around a globe you become the enemy

PATRICIA RYAN

PATRICIA RYAN, R.S.M., has recently published
a book of poetry, *Also Born of the Fire*.

The action begins some years after an unexplained catastrophe has destroyed all living things on earth, except for a few ingenious human survivors. The absence of any vegetation and animal life creates an extreme famine for those who live on. Perpetual winter has descended over the rubble where once cities and villages stood. Sky and soil alike are the color of stale rice pudding. The Man and the Boy push a luggage cart through the snow in an effort to preserve a few relics of their past life and some necessities of the present. Through a series of flashbacks, we learn that the Boy was born on the night of the great event, perhaps 10 years earlier, and also why the Wife (Charlize Theron) has not joined them on their journey. They push their way through this landscape of death southward toward the sea, where they may be able to find food or something else that is not altogether clear. On their way, they gather what supplies they can from a past civilization: a few grains of wheat in an abandoned barn or a dusty can of Coca-Cola.

Competition for provisions drives the survivors to desperation. Pockets of armed scavengers have been driven to cannibalism, and the Man and the Boy find themselves hunted like game animals. They elude a band of hunters who surround them like a pack of horror-film zombies, and when they find refuge in a well-preserved mansion, they discover the implements of a slaughterhouse and an underground holding pen for captured food sources. Desperation has drained the last drops of humanity from the survivors. Their condition gives new meaning to the “dog-eat-dog” concept. The Boy seeks assurances from his father that they

are “the good guys” and would never eat other human beings. He takes comfort in the belief that he and his father are “keepers of the flame,” an interior spirit of humanity, but that flame flickers dangerously low. Their most valuable possession is a revolver with two bullets. They rehearse their plans for suicide in case, at some time, it may be the only alternative to being captured by other travelers.

The vestiges of humanity remain, but barely. Near the end of their journey the two meet a 90-year-old pilgrim (Robert Duvall), and after a brief debate, the Boy persuades his father to give the old man a single can of beans from their dwindling supply of food. It is a futile act, since after their shared meal, the Old Man wanders off alone to die in the cold. In another scene a starving man tries to steal their food, but the Man overtakes him and, at gunpoint, forces him to strip naked to await death from starvation and the cold. The Boy protests his father’s action but can do nothing to stop him. He’s no longer certain that they can continue as “the good guys.”

Realizing that such a grim tale may get Oscar nominations but certainly will not attract much box-office during the holiday season, the creators chose to end the story with an unconvincing and meaningless coda.

Meaning rarely comes easily in apocalyptic fiction. This allegorical tale invites several interpretations, none of them persuasive. Is this a cautionary tale, warning us of the inevitable result of ecological irresponsibility or nuclear war, or does it point out the fragility of human life in a brutal universe that cares little for our paltry concerns? Does our finite planet succumb to the impact of a random asteroid, or does it finally begin to crumble of its own internal fatigue? Although the action seems to be set sometime in the unidentifiable future, the images and artifacts emerge from the present time. Perhaps we should

ponder the possibility that we already live in an apocalyptic age on a planet that has entered its twilight, with humanity so compromised that our heroic struggle for survival has become pointless. Are such pathetic cannibals and scavengers worth the trouble? One scene takes place in an abandoned church with a cruciform light streaming through an empty window frame. Are we to conclude that God still offers some hope, or does the empty, ruined church suggest that even if there were a God, he too has abandoned this once-glorious pinnacle of creation?

The leaden skies, grimy snow and filthy puddles of stagnant water provide the perfect visual context for this

grim message. The production design by Chris Kennedy, as captured by the cinematography of Javier Aguirresarobe, states the theme as eloquently as the spare script of Joe Penhall and the equally spare performance of Viggo Mortensen, who creates an embodiment of weariness in the Man.

I haven't read Cormac McCarthy's novel, but if the film adaptation accurately reflects the original, I think I'd prefer "The Miller's Tale" from Chaucer for my winter reading.

ON THE WEB
 Jake Martin, S.J., reviews the film "Crazy Heart."
americamagazine.org/culture

RICHARD A. BLAKE, S.J., is professor of fine arts and co-director of the film studies program at Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Mass.

all that much/ and one day the ax just fell." These lines actually offer a tight summation of the novel's plot, though as always, Irving pours into the gaps between the opening and closing acts endless digressions, subplots and astonishingly vivid character profiles and geographic vignettes.

The Baciagalupos are a hard-bitten cripple of a cook, Dominic, whom the reader meets in a logging camp in 1954, and a young son, Danny, who is left motherless by a tragic accident involving practically every Irving motif listed above. Watched over by a bear-like logger, Ketchum, who has his own regrets about that accident, they spend almost their entire lives together in danger—first at the hands of the rough loggers who populate the town of Twisted River in Coos County, N.H.; then because of a vengeful sheriff from the same town; then, as the novel progresses, as a consequence of the awful human proclivity for violence that seems to overtake their neighbors and acquaintances everywhere from Boston to Iowa City to Toronto and back to the woods of northern Vermont. Tragedy overtakes them time and again, and yet survival remains their focus.

In between, there are murderous but driverless cars (a wink to Stephen King?), mad dogs and their crazier owners, draft boards, cuckolded spouses, icy roads and twisted rivers, all seeking to touch these two and those they love with death. Their endless efforts to escape from them all do not mean father and son have no time for love affairs, for economic successes and failures, for new experiences of fatherhood and loss and for the ultimate development of Danny into a famous author known for his novels about Vietnam, abortion, horrific family tragedy, and "dysfunctional families; damaging sexual experiences; various losses of innocence, all leading to regret." Starting to sound like a writer you know?

BOOKS | JAMES T. KEANE

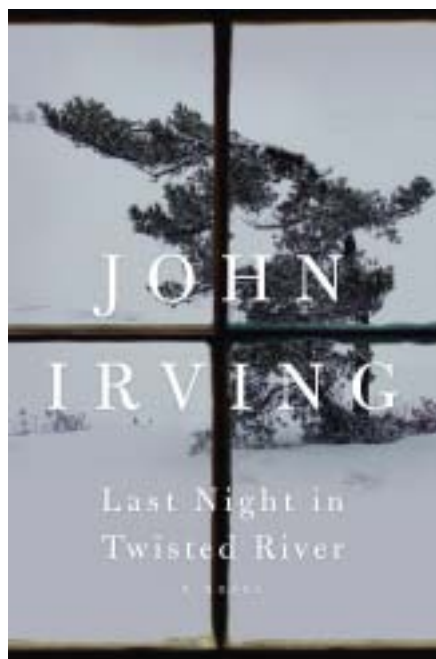
TANGLED UP IN BEARS

LAST NIGHT IN TWISTED RIVER
 A Novel

By John Irving
 Random House. 576p \$28

Bears. Severed limbs. Wrestlers. Doppelgängers. Infidelity and polyamory. Firearms. Tragic accidents, preventable deaths and impossible sorrow, followed by dogged survival. These motifs are more than familiar—in fact, they are legion—to any fan of John Irving's work, and they are again to be found everywhere in his 12th novel, *Last Night in Twisted River*. To characterize the novel as about any of them, however, is to miss the central theme: a father's desire to protect and save his son at any cost.

A long and sprawling (and sprawling) tale of the lives of a father-son combo and the many who love (or hate) them, *Twisted River*



begins with a quote from Bob Dylan's "Tangled Up in Blue": "I had a job in the Great North Woods/ working as a cook for a spell/ but I never did like it

The parallels between Danny Angel (né Daniel Baciagalupo) and Irving himself (né John Wallace Blunt Jr.) are obvious on almost every page, though Irving uses the character of Danny to denounce those readers and journalists who imagine real-life experiences as the driving force behind (either of) the author's novels. Irving has a bit of fun with this, of course, because much of this supposed fiction is less a matter of imagined parallels than of straightforward tongue-in-cheek autobiography, but we take the author at his word and still secretly wonder what on earth those bears ever did to him.

As with many of Irving's novels, once one wrestles into the plot of *Twisted River* it is impossible to stop reading. When Irving is at his best, there are few writers better, and long sections of this 550-page novel are a triumph of storytelling, as if Irving is shouting to the reader: "Look, ma, no hands!" (itself not a bad summary of Irving's fictional obsessions). His ability to prefigure and narrate experiences of personal loss or sudden tragedy can give even the most farcical of subplots an almost shocking profundity. Like *The World According to Garp* and *A Prayer for Owen Meany* before it, *Twisted River* includes a number of moments where the reader suddenly joins the protagonist in wondering: How do these people go on? Irving's caveats aside, no one reads a book like this and denies the author has experienced sorrow and loss at a disturbingly intense level. And yet our fictional Danny Angel claims that "real-life stories were never whole, never complete in the way that novels could be."

Novels, however, can be edited in a way real-life stories cannot be, and here is the primary flaw in *Twisted River*. Despite its many artful moments, it feels somewhat unedited. Irving has never held himself to conventional lengths (*Until I Find You* surpassed 800 pages), but this novel is

self-indulgent in some of its subplots and characterizations, as if Irving felt the need to return to every locale and every theme he has ever explored. Many of these side trips and backtracks contribute little to the overall story. In fact, they are distractions.

Twisted River also slowly turns into an exercise in meta-fiction as it meanders to its close, and we see up close the protagonist fighting the same political and artistic battles as Irving himself as he writes his own fiction. By the final pages (and this is no spoiler) Danny Angel is writing the same lines John Irving wrote in the initial pages of *Twisted River*. So Danny is not John, but Danny is John, and now Danny will create a new protagonist, but it

won't be Danny. In the end one is left with a series of literary nesting dolls, one inside another. Unfortunately, like nesting dolls themselves, this is cute but not much more, and it belabors an obvious point made elsewhere at length in the novel.

Where does this leave the reader? At worst, a bit disappointed in the ultimate payoff; more likely, ignoring or skimming the cute and the extraneous and loving the profound and the vivid and true. There is plenty of all of them to experience before "the ax just falls."

JAMES T. KEANE, S.J., a Jesuit scholastic now studying theology at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif., is a former associate editor of *America*.

JAMES S. TORRENS

HOME COMING

A VILLAGE LIFE Poems

By Louise Glück
Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 80p \$23

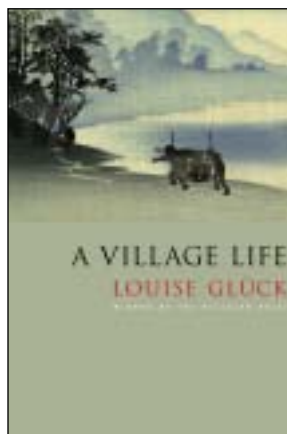
Louise Glück, the U.S. poet laureate for 2003-4, who grew up in New York City, has just produced this sequence of poems about growing up in the country. Her title, *A Village Life*, creates a certain mythical aura because people nowadays refer to "towns" rather than to "villages." Yet, without ever naming or locating a particular place, she makes the village quite real.

This village is not an idyllic environment. Glück says of it, "No one really understands/ the savagery of this place,/ the way it kills people for no reason/ just to keep in practice." Yet in midsummer "the fields

go on forever,/ peaceful, beautiful" ("Pastoral"). A river runs close to town, where the young gather to talk about how dimwitted their parents are and about sex.

The sun is a presiding figure in these pages. The speaker of "A Warm Day" and her neighbor "stand in the sun and the sun heals us./ It doesn't rush away. It hangs above us, unmoving." The sun, in "Olive Trees," makes the leaves shimmer and warms the brick wall of a workplace so that, in autumn, you can go outside and warm your back against it. As an adult, the speaker of most of these

poems has moved away but is drawn to go back for a look. "I had to see if the fields were still shining,/ the sun telling the same lies about how beautiful the world is" ("Sunrise"). What



lies? A workman who is the narrator of "Olive Trees" gives us some clue: "The sun disappears behind the western hills—/ when it comes back, there's no reference at all to your suffering."

Mortality—aging and death—is intimated time and again in *A Village Life*. It looms like the snow peak, to which the Avenue of Liberty fans out from the village and where it "ends in stone" ("Tributaries"). Glück's many references to the body bring home our fragility. "Today I went to the doctor—/.../ What have you done to your body, her silence says./ We gave it to you and look what you did to it" ("A Slip of Paper"). In the title poem, "A Village Life," which concludes the book, the speaker walks her neighbor's dog each Sunday to enable the neighbor to go to church. She does so with pleasure. "I keep in mind images from each walk/.../ so for a while it seems possible/ not to think of the hold of the body weakening, the ratio/ of the body to the void shifting."

Sex and marriage, husbands and wives play out their small dramas in these pages, with bliss just out of reach. Of adolescents, "changed by the music" at a dance, the poet writes: "A spell was on us, but it was a sickness too/ the men and women choosing each other almost by accident, randomly,/ and the lights glittering, misleading,/ because whatever you did then you did forever" ("At the Dance").

The round of seasons and continuum of creaturely life is reflected in phenomena and titles that keep appearing in these pages, especially the autumn ritual revisited in three versions of "Burning Leaves." The first poem shows "death making room for life," but in the final version, ominously, the leaves in the bonfire "change from something to nothing." We get two intriguing "Earthworm" poems as well, and two about "Bats."

Louise Glück writes in long, relaxed lines, at a storytelling pace and with

poetic tension created by the pause at the line endings and by the poet's sharpness of phrasing. Is there a theme, or mood, that holds *A Village Life* together and makes the reading experience more broad and unified? By all means. It is most explicit here in "Midsummer": "You will leave the vil-

lage where you were born" and flourish somewhere else, but mourn something left behind, "even though you can't say what it was,/ and eventually you will return to seek it." Well put, Ms. Glück.

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

THOMAS J. SHELLEY

BEADS OF POWER

THE MYSTERY OF THE ROSARY Marian Devotion and the Reinvention of Catholicism

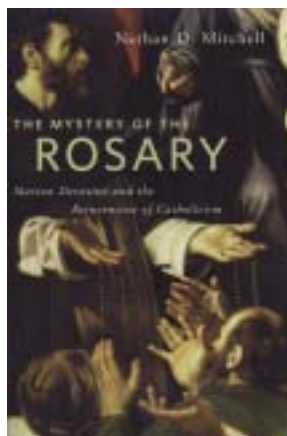
By Nathan D. Mitchell
New York Univ. Press. 336p \$37

It is said that on one occasion a reporter from a national news-magazine went to a Jesuit residence to interview John Courtney Murray, S.J. The reporter arrived unexpectedly early and found him walking in the garden saying the rosary. An embarrassed Father Murray hastily shoved the rosary into his pocket because he did not want to make a display of his piety. Whether the story is true or *ben trovato*, it illustrates nicely one of the themes of this book, the perennial appeal of the rosary to high and low alike, both to distinguished theologians like Murray and to countless other Christians who never cracked a book because they were illiterate. The author notes without comment the popularity of the rosary today with people as diverse as Garry Wills and Mother Angelica.

The use of beads to facilitate prayer is older than Christianity itself and is

not confined to Christians today. Over a century ago Catholic scholars (fortunately, one of them a German Dominican) demolished the venerable legend that Mary personally gave the rosary to St. Dominic. Nathan D. Mitchell, a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame and associate director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy, offers only a cursory survey of the shadowy late medieval origins of the rosary in order to concentrate on the vital role that the rosary played in the renewal of Catholicism in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation.

Mitchell draws upon contemporary historical scholarship, as well as the pioneering work of an older generation of historians like H. Outram-Evennett and John Bossy, to demonstrate the positive and innovative side of the Counter-Reformation, an aspect that he says came to the surface especially in the quarter century between 1585 and 1610. Although he never uses the word, he emphasizes the populist side of the Counter-Reformation that found expression in the preaching of St. Philip Neri and the madonnas of Caravaggio, "where saints, nobles,



working mothers and toddlers, *lazzaroni* with dirty feet and grasping hands, all are drawn into the orbit of Mary and the Christ child.”


The author places the revalorization of the rosary in this context, since

it was in Counter-Reformation Rome, if not earlier, that the telling of the beads was associated with meditation on the great events in salvation history. Moreover, by linking the mysteries of the rosary with the Ignatian meditative

practice of considering oneself a participant in the biblical events, the rosary became an interactive form of prayer. In Mitchell’s words, the rosary “was no longer an exercise in ‘thinking about’ divine mysteries but of participating directly in them.”

Mitchell is too honest a scholar to ignore a darker side of the development of Marian piety associated with the rosary. At the naval battle of Lepanto in 1571, the largest naval battle in history to that date, the Spanish and Venetian fleets won a decisive victory over the Turks. The Christian triumph was widely attributed by Catholics to the intercession of Mary, who had responded to the prayers of the faithful (and of a Dominican pope, Pius V), who were praying the rosary during the battle. The unfortunate result was the intensification of a cult of Mary not only as gentle mother, but also as “warrior queen.” The feast of the Holy Rosary, still celebrated on Oct. 7, which did so much to promote the use of the rosary, was originally called the feast of Our Lady of Victory.

The author rejects the notion that the popularity of the rosary in early modern Europe was confined largely to the rural poor and disdained by the urban elites. On the contrary, he notes the proliferation of parish-based rosary confraternities in Rome and other cities. They were characterized by their inclusivity, the equal participation of men and women and a devotional life that overflowed into a concern for the poor. Nor was the rosary regarded as a strictly private or personal prayer. Thanks in part to the rosary confraternities, it was often linked to the public prayer of the church, and in the Dominican church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome it was recited in choir like one of the liturgical hours. Mitchell also speculates that the popularity of the rosary was due in part to the fact that it gave devout Catholics an opportunity to “customize” their



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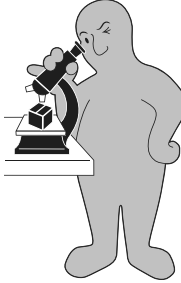
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prayers in a way that was increasingly difficult to do in the Tridentine liturgy.

During the centuries of the penal era in England, Ireland and Scotland, when Catholics were deprived of churches and their priests risked their lives to celebrate the Eucharist for them, the rosary acquired special significance both as a means of sanctification and as a badge of Catholic identity. Scottish Catholics cherished the memory of the martyr St. John Ogilvie, who tossed his rosary from the scaffold to a group of Catholics just before his execution in Edinburgh

in 1615. Later in the century the Church of Scotland began an intensive search for “Papist beads.”

There are fashions in devotion just as in many aspects of secular life. Today where, besides Africa, would one find a novena to St. Rita, whose cult was so popular a century ago? But Mary is different, and because of Mary the rosary is different. While there is no evidence that the origins of the rosary can be traced to direct divine intervention or even ecclesiastical decrees, Mitchell demonstrates that it can be traced to “popular, vernacular

devotion from the ground up,” and that, at least from the 15th century, when it was combined with private meditation, it “gave scope to the human imagination in ways that the church’s more closely regulated rituals did not.” He has effectively drawn from a wide range of historical, literary, artistic and liturgical sources to trace the evolution of the rosary over the past 500 years and explain its enduring popularity.

MSGR. THOMAS J. SHELLEY, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, is a professor of church history at Fordham University in New

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LETTERS

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Impressive Restraint

I am impressed by the breathtaking restraint exercised by Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M. ("A Visitor's Guide," 11/23). As an 81-year-old with 60 years of living this ministerial religious life, I wonder where is the outrage over the secrecy, the disrespect (of L.C.W.R. and each of us) and the presumption of the study. Her word *dismay* is so mild. It would not describe the response of most people I have listened to. The emotions I have met run from profound sadness to profound anger.

At this time in our history, given the demographics and the many struggles of the American sisters, we might expect from our brothers in Rome a campaign of support (moral, spiritual, financial) rather than a very time-consuming project of this sort. Sadness and anger are indeed appropriate responses.

The total absence of any emotive language in Sister Doris's article and her apparently incredible equanimity might serve to assuage fears about us

on the part of those very brothers. That could be to our advantage, I suppose.

BETH McCORMICK, O.P.
Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.

Vox Populi

Re "What if We Said, 'Wait'?" by the Rev. Michael G. Ryan (12/14): What will it take before the Catholic laity find their voice? Must we always speak, sing and pray in words that the Vatican has approved?

DAN MANDELL
South Bend, Ind.

Try Out With Young

Thank goodness for Father Ryan! This exercise in arrested development that passes for liturgical reform is as sad as it is anything else. Retreating to literal translations of the old Missal only ensures that we will have a careful translation. Our good Lord did not write the Missal, however, and there is nothing magical about it. Indeed, hewing to this new approach will only encourage people to think that we Catholics do have a belief in the "magic" of the sacraments. How sad.

Still, my great fear is for young people in their 20s and 30s who have been

raised as thoughtful Catholics, who are very well educated and ready to lead, but who will see the translation as silly and anachronistic. They already wonder at steps that keep women at arm's length and at the burgeoning Communion wars. These young people might well, and perhaps accurately, think that their church wants to push them away. As a parent I want my children in my church. I sincerely hope that they, and others in their generation, will have the benefit of our faith as they face the joys and tribulations of life.

To that end, I add one more suggestion to Father Ryan's. Why not "field test" the new Missal with college students at Holy Cross, Yale, Santa Clara or Boston College? Why not try it with a Mass at Notre Dame or Harvard? Why not ask the rising generation of intelligent Catholics what they think? I suspect we will not because of fear of what they might say. Still, they are the future.

Mark Twain wisely observed that it takes two to tell the truth, one to speak it and one to hear it. Father Ryan has articulated a smart and a thoughtful response that should be heard (and acted upon). I surely hope that will be the outcome; I truly fear that it will not.

W. F. BAGLEY
Madison, Conn.

An Advent Alert

I checked the etymology of the word "wait." Old High German in origin, the word means "to watch, be awake." Sounds like an Advent alert to me. And it sounds like good medicine for translations that came about, not in the customary manner, but by a committee without representation from the people in the pews or sufficient scriptural scholarship. Bishop Trautman tried to "awaken" his brother bishops but got mostly groans from the good shepherds. Do they convene twice yearly just to groan? Does that



CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

sound like openness to the Spirit? I applaud Father Ryan's carefully discerned and most certainly courageous suggestion that we all sit with the Spirit and watch for the right translation. Let their first effort be field tested. But do not start the presses just yet. The bishops should know that the people for whom the word is intended will tell them when they get it right.

BOB KLOOS
Cleveland Heights, Ohio

Avenues for Action

In the 11/30 issue (Letters), John McCarthy wrote of his recent visit to the West Bank, where he witnessed the harsh realities of Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and the toll it takes on the Palestinian people. He spoke of not having "a clear idea of what we can do to change this horrible situation." I offer these suggestions: 1) Do not pay federal taxes until the U.S. government stops providing \$3 billion in military aid to Israel every year; 2) Set up a meeting with your congressperson, show slides from your trip, and ask that he or she oppose the inclusion of \$3 billion in military aid to Israel in the FY 2011 budget, at least until Israel ends the blockade on Gaza and freezes all new settlement construction; 3) Become involved with the growing (and inspiring) Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, a Palestinian-led campaign to divest from companies that support the Israeli military occupation of Palestine (<http://bdsmovement.net>). Good luck and God Bless!

BRENNA CUSSEN
Worcester, Mass.

How Long?

Re "Mind the Gap" (Current Comment, 12/21): In many countries,

including those in the third world, and in many professions (formerly dominated by men, such as medicine and law), women no longer have to fight to be treated as fully equal to men. But not in the church, where women are barred from access to a sacrament because of their genetic makeup. How long before half the ordained clergy are women? How long before half the bishops are women? How long before half of those who create the teachings of the bodiless entity called the "magisterium" are women? How long before the Roman Catholic Church owns up to its institutional sexism, apologizes to women and makes restitution—and we hear the words *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*?

ANNE CHAPMAN
Gilroy, Calif.

Marriage and Matrimony

Re "District Votes for Same-Sex Marriage" (Signs of the Times, 12/21): Isn't it time for the faith communities of this country to relax and recognize that civil laws regarding marriage need have no bearing on the religious rite of matrimony? A marriage certificate issued by the state does not make a marriage sacramental, and the religious community's blessing of a faithful, lifelong, monogamous union does not institute a civil marriage. The current consternation in the Archdiocese of Washington exists because we have combined and confused the two entities in this country. It would be incomprehensible to churches and citizens throughout most of Europe, where marriage [civil] and matrimony [religious] are separately contracted. And since the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize the civil marriage of its adher-

ents, why should it concern itself with the civil marriages of same-sex couples?

(REV.) FRANK BERGEN
Tucson, Ariz.

The Better Question

What precisely is a "tolerably just war" ("Another War President," by John J. DiIulio Jr., 12/21). It is hard for me to understand what lies between justice and injustice. Both of them are objective realities between which there is no realm of actions that can be labeled "kind of just," "a little unjust" or "tolerably just." This underscores our limited ability as creatures to know what is truly just and right. The author also assumes that the manner in which war is waged can be separated from the reasons for going to war. Just war theory is about both the reasons and the manner.

Professor DiIulio is right to say that one fundamental tenet of "just war theory" is that "there must be no other practical or effective means to stop the damage." But how can we know whether this is really the case, particularly given our penchant as Americans to seek short-term solutions to virtually every problem we face? This standard assumes that we have actually tried to exhaust other available means of conflict resolution and have even tried to think of other available means when those we have traditionally used have been exhausted.

I would suggest that the proper question to ask when making the grave and humbling decision to wage war is not whether going to war is just, but whether the failure to go to war would be unjust. The latter question will result in far fewer decisions to go to war than we have been willing to accept uncritically during the decades since World War II.

CHRIS KUCZYNSKI
Baltimore, Md.

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Love Enough for All

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD (C), JAN. 10, 2010

Readings: Is 42:1-7; Ps 29:1-10; Acts 10:34-38; Lk 3:15-16, 21-22

“In truth I see that God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34)

Ask any parent which of their children they love the most, and typically the response will be, “I love all my children equally.” Ask any child, and you will hear otherwise. The oldest daughter thinks she is favored as firstborn and that she holds prime place in her mother’s affections. The youngest son thinks he is the apple of his father’s eye. The middle child knows her specialness—how could she not be the most beloved?

In the second reading today we see Peter as a kind of older sibling wrestling to let go of his notion that, as one who belongs to God’s firstborn, he could claim primacy of affection from his heavenly parent. The scene in Acts 10 is the culmination of a very difficult struggle on Peter’s part to accept the fact that God’s favor could also include others who were not part of God’s firstborn. It took a thrice-repeated vision before Peter could recognize Cornelius as one of God’s favored. Peter’s initial opposition to the heavenly voice that instructed him to eat something he considered unclean (vv. 13-14), was emphatic: “Certainly not!” (N.A.B.); “By no means!” (N.R.S.V.).

After entering Cornelius’s house, Peter converses with the centurion (v. 27). Undoubtedly, in the course of their exchange, Peter discovers that he

is not the only one to whom God has spoken through visions. Cornelius, too, has encountered an angel of God who has called him by name (v. 3). Moreover, Peter finds that this man prays constantly and gives alms generously (v. 2). Peter has to admit to all in the house that whoever fears God and acts uprightly is “acceptable” to God. He acknowledges that “God shows no partiality.”

While this is a great breakthrough for Peter, his recognition of Cornelius as “acceptable” is not exactly a ringing endorsement. Might there be a hint in Peter’s statement that he still considers himself among “God’s favorites,” and that he thinks of Cornelius more like a stepbrother—who certainly could not displace him in the divine affections? More time would be needed before Peter could see the Gentile as being loved as passionately by God as himself.

In the Gospel another heavenly revelation highlights Jesus’ specialness as God’s beloved. While the divine voice at Jesus’ baptism is directed to him (“You are my beloved Son”; see Mt 3:17, “This is my beloved Son”), Luke has added “all the people” to the scene. In this way, Luke hints that they, too, experience the delight of God in them, as they are washed clean, newly born

and favored. As we recall our own baptism, we know that we, too, have been in that thin space where “heaven was opened” and the barrier between humanity and divinity is dissolved. With Jesus’ taking on human flesh and then inviting us to partake of his flesh and blood, the special place he holds in God’s affection is extended to all.

That God is partial



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Reflect on how God has shown partiality toward you.
- How does that divine favor move you to work for justice?
- • •
- What gifts of the Spirit are most fruitful in you?
- Who is the Spirit prompting you to call forward to use their gifts?

to each of us is something startling. This divine favor causes wonder and also carries with it a mission. In the first reading, Isaiah elaborates the mission entrusted to a chosen servant: to bring forth justice. In biblical parlance, justice does not imply that everyone gets what he or she deserves. Rather, it signifies that those who know themselves to be favored by God undeservedly have been empowered by the Spirit to be light, to speak truth and to be compassionate to those who feel

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like “a bruised reed,” fanning into flame the spark of God’s love wherever a smoldering wick is found.

Open Your Gift

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JAN. 17, 2010

Readings: Is 62:1-5; Ps 96:1-10; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Jn 2:1-11

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7)

In the United States, a soon-to-be married couple usually registers at a major department store for the gifts they would most like to receive for their wedding. They choose the pattern of china they like, the glassware and silverware. They list small appliances and other useful items for the home they desire. Friends and relatives choose gifts for the couple from among these items, and the store keeps track of whether or not someone else has already purchased them. It is a very efficient system, not at all the way the Spirit gives gifts.

There is no predictability about how the Spirit distributes the various charisms. One might ask God for a particular gift, and it may or may not be granted. A totally unexpected gift might land in one’s lap, bringing surprise and delight—something you might never have thought to ask for, something that ends up a perfect fit! Sometimes there are unsolicited gifts that can seem like white elephants; they are tucked away until a time when they can be “re-gifted.”

In the second reading today, Paul lists a whole array of gifts the Spirit gives, each one carefully chosen for the individual for whom it is intended: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, mighty deeds, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation. We might picture the Spirit delighting in choosing a gift for each one—a gift that weds the recipient

to the Holy One and impregnates each with God’s fruitful power. None of the Spirit’s gifts are meant to be kept under wraps. They are always meant to bear fruit, not only in the recipient’s life, but also in service toward others.

The wedding scene in today’s Gospel depicts Jesus as hesitant to open his Spirit-given gifts in public. He thinks the time has not yet come. But, as his mother rightly discerns, the need is urgent. Like all prophets, Jesus is reluctant and objects, just as Jeremiah protested that he was too young, and Moses avowed that he could not speak well. Jesus’ mother, however, seems to take on the role of the wedding planner. She works behind the scenes, using

her gifts of insight and knowledge, setting the stage for the sign that Jesus will perform. She knows that the time has come for her son to offer his gifts publicly to bring the marriage between humanity and divinity to consummation.

Just as a wedding is only the beginning of a lifelong love affair, so the sign Jesus performs at Cana is the beginning of the many signs that revealed his glory. It is also the beginning of the disciples’ belief in Jesus, who himself is the bridegroom, as John the Baptist acknowledges (Jn 3:29). The gift of Jesus himself is one that far surpasses any other that we could have on our “wish list.”

BARBARA E. REID

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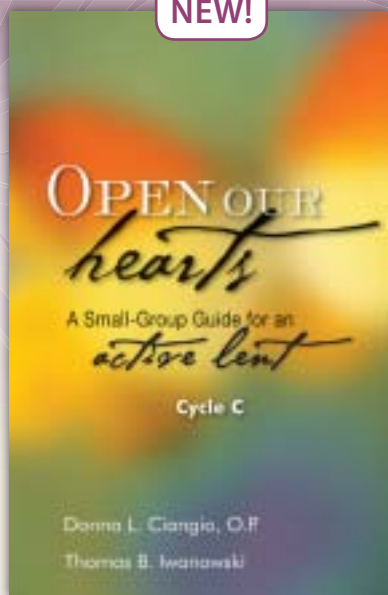
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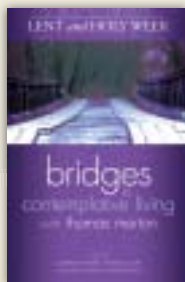
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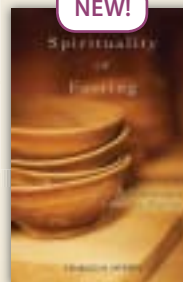


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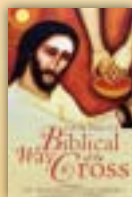


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