



# America

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## Reconstructing Christ

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

An Excommunication  
in Phoenix

KEVIN O'ROURKE

# OF MANY THINGS

In 1996-97 the international community was picking up the pieces after the wars of secession in the former Yugoslavia. The hardest problems were to be found in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the small, internally divided republic shared by Muslim Bosniaks, Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs. Richard Schifter, a senior adviser in the Clinton White House, called together a group of Washington-based religious representatives to explore how physical reconstruction could be used to support ethnic and religious reconciliation.

His illustration was a rebuilding program in which Bosniak homes might be rebuilt by Croat carpenters with building supplies purchased from Serbian lumber yards.

To Daniel Philpott and Gerard F. Powers, editors of *Strategies of Peace: Transforming Conflict in a Violent World* (Oxford), Ambassador Shifter's proposal would count as an early example of strategic peacebuilding, integrating two previously distinct activities in the interest of establishing a more stable and enduring peace. Philpott and Powers propose that peacemakers in a variety of fields carry out their work within a broader vision of the requirements of peace. As Philpott helpfully explains, in practice the title means making "wider and deeper" inquiry into the challenges a particular peacemaking effort faces.

In much the same way as the military has discovered that civil-political relations, policing and development specialists are required to wage a successful counterinsurgency campaign, so too have peacemakers refined their strategies. In the view of the two Notre Dame peace experts, peacemakers whether at home or in the field need to probe the edges of their specialized activities and make connections with other programs and professionals. This is a change from recent practice, in which peacemaking activities have only occasionally been

consciously integrated.

Not all connections, whether between subfields or experts, come easily. The best-known tension among peacemakers, as the book points out, may be found between the proponents of "transitional justice," who argue for prosecution for human rights violations and war crimes, and those intent on advancing the steps needed for a sustainable peace, such as amnesty or intergroup reconciliation, that may prohibit or delay punishment.

International lawyers and human rights advocates are often adamant that those who violated the peace need to be punished, whereas professionals in conflict resolution are willing to accept amnesties or truth and reconciliation commissions, even though they entail foregoing, at least for a time, punishment of offenders.

One of the notable contributions of this book is to highlight less examined fields like religious peacebuilding. The co-editors' own contributions are especially strong in this regard. Philpott's "Reconciliation: An Ethic for Peacebuilding" is a model of exact yet accessible interdisciplinary thinking on one of the promising peacemaking specialties. Powers's "Religion and Peacemaking" examines the engagement of organized religion in peacebuilding, a valuable resource in religio-ethnic conflicts and in failed states, where organized religion is often the only viable institution.

My one regret is that in the whole book there is no adequate treatment of nonviolence. Powers's short discussion of the topic spends more ink on the just war, where his own interest lies, than on nonviolence, a movement that remains central to religious peacemaking. He concludes, "More Mahatma Gandhis are always necessary, but even more needed are more Reinhold Niebuhrs."

I would have put it the other way round. But read and decide for yourself.

**DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.**

# America

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Cover: The sculptor Markus Menendes works on the head of a statue of Christ in Sertaozinho, Brazil, in 2009. Photo: Reuters/Paulo Whitaker.



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A conversation with **Luke Timothy Johnson**, right, and an archive of articles on **bioethical questions**. Plus, John P. McCarthy reviews the film "Get Low."

All at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).



### Total Football

After a monthlong tournament that was not short on surprises, the World Cup soccer competition ended on July 11 as many predicted it would: with Spain holding aloft the coveted trophy for the first time. With six starters from the Barcelona football club, the Spanish team was hailed as a symbol of national unity in a country with a well-known history of political division. Such good feeling may pass, sadly, as it did for France in the wake of their early exit from the tournament. In 1998 France's ethnically diverse World Cup-winning team was held up as representative of a new France. Twelve years later a team that included 13 men of color was pilloried in its home country for not being sufficiently patriotic.

The ethnic diversity of the teams was among the most compelling storylines of the tournament. Here was Germany's Mesut Özil, a midfielder of Turkish descent, scoring a goal from 25 yards out to rescue the team's World Cup hopes. Who cared if on occasion Özil failed to sing along with the country's national anthem? His goal helped advance Germany to the round of 16. National loyalty melted away, too, as Ghana moved into the round of 8. The South African crowd rallied behind the team as the standard bearer for the continent. By the end of the tournament, most fans had switched their allegiances many times over. In the final game South Africans were even rooting for the Dutch, their former colonial rulers. Which is how it should be on the final day of the World Cup. A contest that begins with too much jingoism ends with fans worldwide reveling in the final outcome. ¡Viva España!

### The Future of Farm Workers

For anyone concerned that undocumented immigrants are taking jobs from American citizens, the United Farm Workers has a response: Come take them back. The U.F.W. has created a Web site called [takeourjobs.org](http://takeourjobs.org). A statement on the site argues that Americans incorrectly correlate the high unemployment rates in the United States with the increasing number of undocumented immigrants. The statement concludes with a challenge: "Farm workers are ready to welcome citizens and legal residents who wish to replace them in the field. We will use our knowledge and staff to help connect the unemployed with farm employers."

Founded by Cesar Chavez in 1962 as the National Farm Workers Association, the organization works to improve working conditions and ensure fair wages for those laboring in the fields. Today, at least 50 percent of the farm workers

in the United States are not legally allowed to work here, but the work they do is a vital part of the agricultural industry. As part of its larger efforts, the U.F.W. helped to draft the bipartisan Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security bill. First introduced in 2003, the bill languished for years before it was reintroduced in 2009. If passed, the bill will offer temporary resident status to workers with at least two years experience who promise to work in American agriculture for an additional five years. It also would streamline the administrative process for approval of temporary resident status, which benefits both employers and workers. Its passage would help stabilize the agricultural work force and the family lives of the workers, who would no longer live in fear of deportation.

In an interview on "The Colbert Report," the current U.F.W. president, Arturo Rodriguez, said the organization has placed only three American citizens in the fields. If the AgJOBS bill does not pass soon, the U.S. agricultural industry may need many more citizens to volunteer.

### Death on the High Seas

Reality television usually contains little that is real. For some years, "The Real World," one progenitor of American reality television, has relied on a tired format, throwing together unstable twentysomethings in predictable mixes (one African-American, one gay man and so on) with predictably explosive results. That's why the latest season of Discovery Channel's "Deadliest Catch" has proven surprising. The popular show focuses on the travails of the crab fishermen of Alaska. Over the last few years viewers have come to know the hard-bitten crews as they ply the unforgiving Bering Sea in search of king and opilio crabs.

This season, one of the unlikely "stars" of the show, Capt. Phil Harris, a chain-smoking, hard-drinking, foul-mouthed veteran crabber, suffered a stroke. His relationships with his two complicated sons, who work on his ship, have been at the heart of the series. Harris told producers to keep the cameras running, even as he entered the hospital. So unlike other reality shows, which gin up situations to create fake tension, "Deadliest Catch" has found real pathos. In the episode focusing on Harris's hospitalization, one tough crewmate told Harris's son he needed to be at his father's side, not on the boat. Nearing death, Harris whispered an apology, "I'm sorry that I was a bad father." His son compassionately brushed off the apology and professed his love for his tough dad. It was a vivid reminder that grace is everywhere: on the Bering Sea, in a hospital bed and even on television.

# Guns and the Court

The Supreme Court's 5-to-4 decision on June 28 in *McDonald v. Chicago* overturned that city's strict ban on handgun ownership. The ruling means that a homeowner may keep a handgun for self-defense. It marks a setback for gun control advocates and a victory for gun-rights proponents who claim that guns in the home make people safer. But the National Institute of Justice says the opposite, that keeping a gun in the home is associated with an increased risk of violent death by suicide or homicide and offers little protection from homicide at the hands of an intruder.

Unlike its 2008 ruling in *Heller v. District of Columbia*, which applied only to federal enclaves like the District, the court's current decision applies in all states and localities. But the court's recent ruling notes that its decision does not necessarily strike down all local firearms regulations around the nation. Writing for the majority in the recent ruling, Justice Samuel Alito observed that the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms is not "a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever for whatsoever purpose," nor was the court questioning regulations such as those that prevent the mentally ill and felons from having guns. The 14th Amendment also entered into the decision, when Justice Alito wrote that the court's decision stemmed partly from the amendment, whose framers wanted to make sure that African Americans in the South could protect themselves from white supremacists.

Responding to the court's decision, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley proposed alternative restrictions that he hopes will pass muster. In addition to requiring a firearms safety class and an exam, Daley's proposal bans gun shops in Chicago. It also prohibits gun owners from stepping outside their homes, even onto their own porch with a handgun. In Chicago, on the third weekend of this past June, the very month of the Supreme Court's decision, 50 people were shot; and seven of them died. Nationwide each year an average of 30,000 people die in gun violence, suicide and mass killings.

But Chicago's new ordinance is already facing a lawsuit. The Illinois Association of Firearms Retailers has filed suit, alleging that the ordinance infringes on the residents' constitutional right to bear arms. The months and years ahead will bring many such challenges to local and state laws by gun-rights activists intent on overturning anti-gun ordi-

nances. Kristen Rand, legislative director of the Violence Policy Center, has predicted that the litigation will "force cities, counties and states to expend scarce resources to defend longstanding, effective public safety laws." But she told *America* that many of the challenges will probably withstand judicial scrutiny. The reconstituted gun laws in the District of Columbia—close to what they were before the *Heller* case—now have restrictive licensing requirements "that discourage people from choosing to bring a gun into their home, and this has meant that comparatively few there have legally obtained handguns." The U.S. District Court has upheld the new ordinance.

New York City's stringent gun laws are almost sure to be challenged, as are New Jersey's. The latter approved a law last year that prohibits individuals from purchasing more than one gun every 30 days. The New Jersey law also requires a prospective purchaser to obtain a police-issued permit for each handgun purchased and to undergo fingerprinting and background checks. On the West coast, California also expects challenges by gun-rights groups. It has long had statewide restrictions on the sale and possession of military-style automatic weapons. Los Angeles' limits are among the most stringent: they ban the sale or transfer of easily concealed weapons and cheap handguns. Overall, the state's strict laws have proven successful. Since 1993, the mortality rate from gun-related deaths there has fallen 20 percent more than in the rest of the nation.

Now, gun groups are intent on challenging restrictive laws around the nation and on expanding so-called open-carry and concealed weapons initiatives. The governor of Louisiana has signed into law a provision that allows people to carry handguns into churches. Virginia permits gun owners to carry their weapons into establishments that serve liquor. The gun violence prevention community is working to prevent such laws and to counter the gun lobby's illusory message that more guns make us safer. The Centers for Disease Control has reported that American children age 14 and under are 16 times more likely than children in other industrialized nations to be murdered with a gun and 11 times more likely to commit suicide with a gun. Statistics like these suggest the need for more and better, rather than fewer and weaker, gun control laws.



# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

### Supreme Court Ruling Threatens Work of Peace

**T**he Bible says “seek peace and pursue it.” But in light of a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, some international peace builders might want to reexamine where that pursuit takes them.

In June, the court voted 6 to 3 to uphold a federal law that makes it a crime knowingly to provide “material support” to organizations designated by the State Department as foreign terrorist groups. The term “material support” encompasses tangible items like money, materials and goods as well as less concrete forms of support like “service” or “expert advice or assistance.” The latter includes advising and training organizations in how to take nonviolent paths toward political goals.

In *Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*, the court concluded that the material support law was written broadly because any type of U.S. aid to terrorist groups could serve to “legitimate” these groups. Violating the material support law is punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Humanitarian groups and peace-builders were left puzzled as to how the decision would affect their work

George A. Lopez, a professor with the University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace

Studies, said the ruling could put some international peace organizations “in a very odd situation.”

“We’re allowed to work with the Colombian bishops, but we’re not allowed to work with them in the same room when they are working” with

groups on the terrorist list, Lopez said. “What happens to that relationship with the local bishops’ conference or a local Caritas organization that’s dealing with the rebels...is there guilt by association? This ruling leaves that very, very nebulous.”



**Catholic leaders in Sri Lanka have sought to play a mediating role in the destructive conflict between the government and the Tamil Tigers.**

## NEW ROMAN MISSAL

### Musicians Prepare for Coming Changes in Mass Text

**A**dapting to the upcoming changes to the English text of the Mass was among the principal concerns of the nearly 2,000 people who attended the convention of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians in Detroit in July.

“All of the musical settings need to be rewritten,” said Annette Wright, director of music at St. Francis of Assisi/St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish in Ray Township, Mich. The current arrangements cannot simply be tweaked, she argued, because parishioners are so familiar with them. For

example, changing the words of Marty Haugen’s “Mass of Creation,” one of the most popular arrangements among church musicians, would most likely confuse people, Wright said.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments is in the final stages of reviewing the new translation of the Roman Missal. Once the Vatican issues its *recognitio*, or approval, the president of each bishops’ conference will decide when to implement the new translation. In the United States the changes are expected to take effect beginning in Advent 2011.

Composers are already taking advantage of the opportunity presented by the new translation. One hundred fifty arrangements were submitted to the National Association of Pastoral Musicians in advance of this year’s convention. Attendees listened to the four semifinalists and voted for their favorite.

Louis Canter, coordinator of music ministries for the Archdiocese of Detroit, said it is important for parish music directors to understand the new translation so they can educate their congregations. “We don’t want to make the same mistakes we did with [the changes that came out of] Vatican II at the beginning, when there wasn’t a lot of catechesis,” Canter said.

Some parish music directors are





One option is for groups involved in peace building to lobby Congress to revisit the material support law, which was originally passed in 1996.

“Whatever the strict interpretation of the law is, the policy behind it seems very foolish,” said the Rev. John

Converset, director of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office for North America’s Comboni Missionaries. “Are we trying to force people to remain violent? Do we not want to give them the chance to move from violence? Humanitarian assistance undermines terrorism.”

Not all terrorist groups reach the point where they are receptive to adopting peaceful strategies. But some groups designated as terrorists have become mainstream political entities, said Page Fortna of the Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University. She cited several examples, including South Africa’s African National Congress and El Salvador’s Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front.

“Terrorist groups aren’t different from other violent political actors, other rebel groups,” Fortna said. “They are strategic actors, so they are trying to figure out the cost of continuing to fight and the cost of continuing to use

terrorist tactics versus settling.”

The Supreme Court case stems from a lawsuit filed by the Humanitarian Law Project and other groups arguing that the material support law violated the First Amendment right to free speech, and that terms like “service” and “expert advice or assistance” were too vague. The Supreme Court decision overturned a previous ruling by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

The Humanitarian Law Project also sought an injunction that would allow the group to provide support to two foreign terrorist organizations: the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in Turkey and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka.

The original material support statute was enacted in 1996 as part of the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act. The 2001 Patriot Act expanded the definition of material support to include expert advice or assistance.

expecting some members of their congregations to resist the changes. “I think you’re going to lose some people, at least temporarily,” said Matt Kush, director of music and worship at St. Kieran Parish in Shelby Township, Mich.

Many Catholics know the current responses by heart, Kush noted, and he doubts they will be willing to refer to a text in order to recite the new responses correctly. “It’s hard enough to get them to pick up a book to sing a song,” Kush said.

Ron Vanadslen, director of music ministry at St. John Brebeuf Parish in Niles, Ill., said music directors should manage the way the changes are introduced to their congregations. Vanadslen recommended the

approach of Liturgical Training Publications, which advises that “eight months before the changes officially go into effect, we should introduce the new Gloria, and then some months later introduce the new Creed.”

Though not enthusiastic about the coming changes, Kathleen Hughes, R.S.C.J., counseled her colleagues to stay positive. A former member of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, the body that developed the current English translation of the Mass, Hughes advised attendees to “make a

choice now not to be cranky about the new translations” and instead to “develop generous hearts about the tastes, practices and beliefs of those with whom we disagree.”



**Members of the multicultural choir from St. Camilius Parish in Silver Spring, Md.**

## Common Ground On Immigration

The heated national debate over Arizona's new immigration law has obscured the fact that there is "actual common ground" among Americans on "key elements" of immigration reform, said Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles. In a statement dated July 12, Cardinal Mahony cited five areas of commonality: the need for the home countries of immigrants to take greater responsibility for the plight of their citizens; increased border security; making more visas available for unskilled workers; the importance of filling agriculture jobs; and the implementation of the Dream Act, which would allow children of undocumented immigrants brought to the United States at an early age to become legal residents. One area that "creates sharp divisions among us" is the proposed path to citizenship for those currently in this country illegally, Mahony said. Immigrant advocates are not proposing a "general pardon," he explained. "Immigrants here without permission would be required to pay for their transgression and 'get right' with the law, then earn their way toward eventual citizenship," he said.

## AIDS Study Supports Faith Leaders' Work

A new study sponsored by the United Nations lends credibility to faith leaders who have long argued that behavioral change is key to combating the spread of AIDS, says a Catholic expert on the disease. "Within the United Nations, there is more and more attention to focusing on abstinence and the reduction of the number of sexual partners as well as the strategy of promoting condoms," said Msgr. Robert Vitillo, special adviser to Caritas

## NEWS BRIEFS

Two weeks after the government of Peru threatened to expel **Paul McAuley**, a La Salle brother and British missionary known for his environmental defense work, the president of the Peruvian bishops' conference expressed his "full support for the...[country's] missionaries in their work of evangelization." + A University of Illinois faculty committee is reviewing the **dismissal of a Catholic professor** after a student complained about the instructor's explanation of the church's teaching that homosexual acts are morally wrong. + The British government has removed from its Web site a user-generated **petition protesting Pope Benedict XVI's** planned visit on Sept. 16-19 to England and Scotland. + Cardinal **Daniel DiNardo**, the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities, praised the Department of Health and Human Services on July 15 for reaffirming that no federal funds will be provided to cover elective abortions under state-run health insurance plans. + A Christian group is sponsoring radio advertisements this summer criticizing the Fox News host **Glenn Beck** for attacking churches that preach about social justice.



**Paul  
McAuley**

Internationalis on H.I.V. and AIDS. "This is a validation of what we've done." Released on July 13, the study from the Joint U.N. Program on H.I.V./AIDS indicates that the prevalence of H.I.V. among young people has declined by more than 25 percent in 15 of the 21 countries most affected by the disease. In eight countries, the declines in H.I.V. rates resulted, at least in part, from positive changes in sexual behavior among young people, including youth waiting longer before they become sexually active and having fewer partners.

## Professor Defends Muslim Center

The campaign to prevent the construction of a Muslim community center near the site of the World Trade Center attacks is emblematic of an "Islamophobia" that is "a threat to

the very fabric of our democratic, pluralistic way of life," said a prominent scholar of Islam. In an op-ed contribution on CNN.com (July 19), John L. Esposito, the director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, disputed the notion that the construction of the center would be a dishonor to those who died on Sept. 11, 2001. Esposito noted that Cordoba House, as the project is known, would be a community center, not a mosque as has been widely reported, and would be available to all members of the community, not just Muslims. "Mosque construction in the United States has become a catalyst for increased anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiment, discrimination and hate crimes in recent years," he said.

From CNS and other sources.





# Faith, Hope and Humpty

‘F’unny,” she said, “How much right-side-up can come from upside down.”

This hopeful message greets me every morning when I sit down at my desk and reread the card a very understanding friend sent to me during my recent upheavals. The picture accompanying the caption shows someone bending over backward, her head upside down, with a bemused, but not overly fearful expression on her face and a Ferris wheel in the background. My friend inquired: “Could this be you?”

Five centuries ago, if the greeting card industry had been flourishing then, one might have sent this card to Íñigo de Loyola, whose feast day we celebrate on July 31. His knee, his pride and his burgeoning military career had just been shattered by a cannon ball while he was defending the fortress of Pamplona against a French assault. From one moment to the next, everything he thought he was about and had well under control was in pieces. It brings to mind Humpty Dumpty, who, after falling off a wall, could not be put back together again, even by all the king’s horses and all the king’s men.

The right-side-up from this particular upside down would reveal itself through a long and painful period of convalescence, a dramatic spiritual conversion and a total change of plan—from Íñigo’s plan for himself to God’s plan for Ignatius.

Humpty Dumpty seems to be an especially meaningful symbol right

now. I have observed his various crashes on the world stage and in my own domestic arrangements, and I am left asking myself in the light of my friend’s card: “Is the egg really smashed, or is it hatching?” Might a chick be emerging from the broken pieces?

On the domestic scene, I am in the throes of moving house—but nothing so simple as moving from House A to House B. There is, as yet, no House B, and House A is no longer mine. I feel like Indiana Jones standing on a cliff and wondering whether a bridge will appear, knowing that the only way to find out is to step forward.

So for the intervening months I have become more than usually itinerant, partly travelling, partly gratefully receiving the hospitality of friends; and soon I will move to temporary accommodation in Scotland, where I hope to discover the elusive House B. The right-side-up of all this is a rediscovery of the importance and the difficulty of “detachment”—of sitting lightly to all created things, so that if and when it becomes necessary, they can be let go. The pain involved in that letting-go is a birthing pain. Something new is emerging, not just in where I will live but in how I will live.

Nationally, Humpty recently fell off the back of the sacred cow of bipartisan adversarial politics in the United Kingdom. To everyone’s complete amazement, we woke up one May morning to discover that we had no government. The message of the people had been resoundingly delivered: We want you now to work together,

rather than against each other, for the greater good of us all and not just of your own parties.

It was a stunningly upside-down week, followed by months of adjustment to the new face of British politics. The right-side-up will show itself, we hope in a new spirit of cooperation. A lot of humble pie has been eaten, and words uttered in anger have had to be swallowed. Not a bad way to begin a new era.

I ask myself: ‘Is the egg really smashed, or is it hatching?’

And if all of that were not enough to contemplate, along came the infamous cloud of volcanic ash indiscriminately grounding our travel plans, leaving us stranded around the globe. The upside down was all over our television screens, even if we were not personally caught up in the disorder. The right-side-up began to dawn: “God is the creator and we are the creatures”—a first principle of life and of Ignatius’ insights. We may have all the plans in the world, but the eruption of a minor volcano in a remote land can bring them crashing down, and the chick that hatches from the mess is named *humility*, a call to return to a right understanding of the way things are—God-centered, not me-centered.

Jesus warns us often that things may have to break down before they can be renewed, that the seed has to fall into the ground before the new life can sprout, that the egg has to break before the chick can hatch.

What makes God laugh? People who make plans! Jesus knew it. Ignatius discovered it. We are learning it.

MARGARET SILF lives in Scotland. Her latest books are *Companions of Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living*, *The Gift of Prayer* and *Compass Points*.



© STRINGER BRAZIL / REUTERS

An aerial view of the restoration of the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro, April 2010.





WHY HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP  
CANNOT FIND THE LIVING JESUS

# The Jesus Controversy

BY LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

I find myself these days trailing a band of wandering academic troubadours, scholars who are invited by congregations to give lectures as part of adult education programs. More often than not, I follow the likes of Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, N. T. Wright and Bart Ehrman, and I am frequently invited as someone who can “represent another view.” In other words, I am a sidenote to the preferred menu of historical Jesus offerings. When I do offer an alternative way of thinking about the Jesus of the Gospels, there are invariably some in the congregation who find it puzzling that I should be so at odds with what they take to be the best of biblical scholarship. In short, 25 years after the Jesus Seminar started a new round in the historical Jesus controversy and 14 years after I tried (in *The Real Jesus*) to show how contemporary historical Jesus scholarship was—with some exceptions—bogus, there is still an eager audience for the tune these troubadours sing.

The reasons are not hard to find. The troubadours are, without exception, extraordinary teachers and public speakers with well-earned reputations for instructing in a lively and even entertaining fashion. Mr. Borg and Bishop Wright, moreover, explicitly embrace Christian identity and convey a positive rather than negative sense of what scholarship can offer. Ehrman is a gifted teacher. And Mr. Crossan is *sui generis*, a man so full of wit and verbal play that I am personally willing to hear him speak on any subject at all. The personal charisma of the speakers is undoubtedly part of the appeal.

The speakers have also effectively marketed their presentations as genuine scholarship; they claim to make publicly available the critical approach that, they suggest, other academics also follow but keep within the professional guild. Congregations and parishes starving for some intellectual stimulus are eager consumers. Few follow closely what bibli-

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cal scholars are doing. What basis for comparison is available in books from Barnes & Noble? Audiences have little reason to challenge the troubadours' claim to represent the best the academy has to offer. In fact, were these congregations aware of the desperately trivial character of much academic scholarship, they would be even more willing to accept as vital and necessary the words of those who are providing insight into the figure of Jesus for the church rather than developing another esoteric methodology for the sake of tenure.

Most of all, I think, congregations are truly eager to learn about the human Jesus and too often find what they hear in sermons and Sunday schools to have little intellectual substance or spiritual nourishment. They desire a grown-up faith, and the itinerant speakers appear to offer a quicker, more interesting path to such maturity than is available through traditional practices of faith. For those schooled to value information over insight, the offer of historical knowledge about Jesus seems just the ticket.

## Limits of History

There is absolutely nothing wrong with studying Jesus as a historical figure, and if we so study him, it is correct to bracket the premises of faith. The sort of project undertaken by Msgr. J. P. Meier in *A Marginal Jew*, which tests what elements in the Gospel accounts can be historically verified, is perfectly legitimate and yields genuine results. But as Monsignor Meier himself recognizes, the empirically verifiable Jesus is by no means the "real" Jesus. It is more than legitimate, moreover, to learn as much history as possible about the first-century world of Jesus. The point of this knowledge, however, is to become better and more responsible readers of the Gospels themselves. It is not to deconstruct the Gospel narratives in order to reconstruct a "historical Jesus" and claim thereby to have discovered who Jesus really was. Still less is it to propose such a reconstruction as normative for Christians today.

History is a limited way of knowing reality. Dependent on the fragmentary bits of what was observed, recorded, saved and transmitted from the past, recognizing that all human witness is biased and cautious about speculating beyond available evidence, responsible historians know they deal only in probabilities, not certainties. There is a descriptive art rather than a prescriptive science. And in the case of Jesus and the Gospels, the critical problems facing all historical reconstruction are extreme, warning investigators against pushing against the limits. Thus, historians can assert with greater or lesser probability certain facts about Jesus (his death by crucifixion) or certain patterns of his ministry (speaking in parables) or even certain incidents

(his baptism by John). But historians cannot on the basis of those probable conclusions offer an alternative narrative or interpretation from those found in the Gospels.

Just such a pushing of the limits of responsible historiography, however, just such an offering of alternatives to the Gospels is what has propelled the entire historical Jesus project, today as in the past. Three aspects of the project are objectionable even when one grants the legitimacy of using history for Jesus. First, history cannot deliver what the historical Jesus project promises, namely a solid version of

Jesus other than that of the Gospels. Second, the effort to reconstruct such an alternative Jesus leads to a distortion of the methods that belong to sober historiography. Third, and most sadly, the Jesus offered as an alternative is often a mirror

image of the scholar's own ideals. It is not surprising, then, that virtually every sort of Jesus reconstructed by scholars in this generation is based solidly on the Jesus of the Gospel of Luke, for this is the Jesus we most admire—political, public, prophetic, the one who includes the marginal and challenges the status of the powerful. In this sense, the multiple versions of the "historical Jesus" often presented by lecture or by book today have precisely the same status as apocryphal gospels in the early church: They can entertain and sometimes even instruct, but they are not a foundation on which to build the church.

## An Alternative

So what do I offer the congregations who invite me to share my "alternative view"? I try to affirm their desire for a mature and intellectually alive faith and encourage the study of history as a means for a more responsible reading of the Gospels. I am convinced that the more genuine a sense of historical study such seeking Christians gain, the less they will be prey to the distortions of those who trade on the title of historian while offering only a form of personal apocrypha. But I emphasize that the real point of historical knowledge is not the dismantling of the Gospels but a fuller engagement with the Gospel narrative. One of the perhaps surprising results of the best historical study of first-century Palestine, I point out, is that the incidental information provided by the Gospels concerning Jesus' political and cultural context and religious environment tends to confirm rather than disprove the information about those matters in the Gospels.

More important, I try to show how encountering Jesus as a literary character in each of the canonical Gospels makes possible a more profound, satisfying and ultimately more "historical" knowledge of the human Jesus than that offered by scholarly reconstructions. Once readers recognize and begin to appreciate the diverse portraits of Jesus found in the Gospels, not as the poor offerings of historical sources

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A conversation with  
Luke Timothy Johnson.  
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but as the rich witness of faith, they begin to sense that the human Jesus is a far richer and elusive reality than either superficial belief or superficial historical scholarship would suggest. Such literary appreciation of the Gospels also leads to the insight that despite their divergent perspectives and themes, they converge impressively precisely on the historical issue that is of the most vital importance concerning the human Jesus, namely his character. What sort of person was Jesus? Each Gospel witnesses to the truth that Jesus as a human being was defined first by his radical obedience to God and second by his utter self-giving to others. This Jesus of the Gospels is the same Jesus found in the letters of Paul and Peter and in the Letter to the Hebrews. It is the historic Christ who shaped the identity of Christian discipleship through the ages and generated prophetic reform in every age of the church.

### **‘He Lives Now’**

Most of all, I try to remind my audience that the entire quest for the historical Jesus is a massive deflection of Christian awareness from its proper focus: learning the living Jesus—the resurrected and exalted Lord present to believers through the power of the Holy Spirit—in the common life and common practices of the church. To concentrate on “the historical Jesus,” as though the ministry of Jesus as reconstructed by scholarship were of ultimate importance for the life of discipleship, is to forget the most important truth about Jesus—namely, that he lives now as Lord in the full presence and power of God and presses upon us at every moment not as a memory of the past but as a presence that defines our present. If Jesus is simply a dead man of the past, then knowing him through historical reconstruction is necessary and inevitable. But if he lives in the present as powerful and commanding Lord, then he must be learned through the obedience of faith.

Jesus is best learned not as a result of an individual’s scholarly quest that is published in a book, but as a continuing process of personal transformation within a community of disciples. Jesus is learned through the faithful reading of the Scriptures, true, but he is learned as well through the sacraments (above all the Eucharist), the lives of saints (dead and living) and the strangers with whom the exalted Lord especially associates himself. Next to such a difficult and complex form of learning Jesus as he truly is—the life-giving Spirit who enlivens above all the assembly called the body of Christ—the investigations of historians, even at their best, seem but a drab and impoverished distraction.

Such is the tune I sing as I follow in the train of the troubadours dancing before me through the scattered parishes and congregations of this country. It is an old song, what St. Augustine called the “alleluia song.” But it is also always new and always renewing. 

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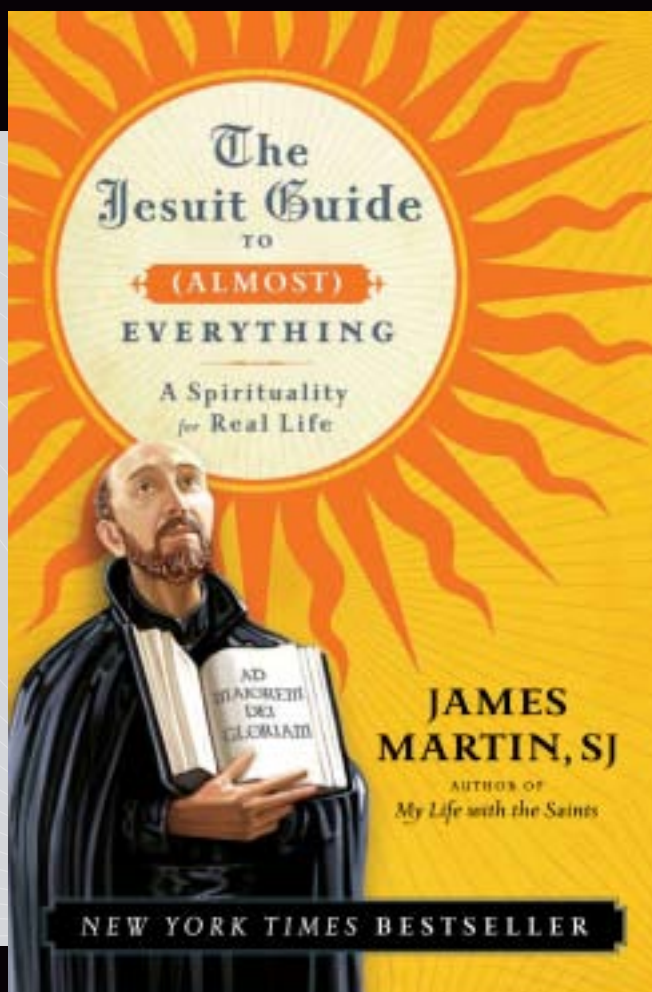


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From the author of *My Life with the Saints*



# Complications

A Catholic hospital, a pregnant mother and a questionable excommunication

BY KEVIN O'ROURKE

**B**y now most Catholics are well acquainted with the case of Margaret Mary McBride, of the Sisters of Mercy. In March the bishop of Phoenix publicly declared that Sister McBride, who is head of the ethics committee at a local Catholic hospital, had incurred an excommunication when she concurred with the hospital's decision to abort the fetus of a gravely ill woman. The emotional furor following these actions was instigated and reported by Catholic and secular media outlets. The purpose of this article is not to add to the accusations directed at the various people and offices involved in the case. Rather, my intent is to consider the moral (bioethical) and canonical (legal) complexities of cases of this nature, to suggest how to avoid confusion in the future and perhaps to prompt some second thoughts.

In the fall of 2009, a 27-year-old woman with four children was admitted to St. Joseph Hospital and Medical Center in Phoenix, Ariz., because of her worsening symptoms of pulmonary hypertension. Knowing that she was about 10 weeks pregnant, she was advised, prior to entering the hospital, that the safest course was to terminate the pregnancy. She rejected this proposal. The fact that she chose a Catholic hospital for treatment suggests that she did not want an abortion.

As the woman's condition deteriorated, a cardiac catharization revealed that she suffered from "very severe pulmonary arterial hypertension with profoundly reduced cardiac output" and "right heart failure" and "cardiogenic shock," according to the report by the hospital's ethics committee. In other words, the medical staff believed that both

mother and child would die if the present situation were allowed to continue. Thus, termination of the pregnancy was recommended and agreed to by the mother. Because of the seriousness of her condition, she could not be moved to another hospital.

## The Moral Case

In accord with hospital policy, the case was referred to the ethics committee of the hospital. The *Ethical and Religious*



Sister Margaret Mary McBride

*Directives for Catholic Health Services*, issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, offers guidance for situations of this nature. Directive 45 states: "Abortion (that is, the directly intended termination of pregnancy before viability or the directly intended destruction of a viable fetus) is never permitted. Every procedure whose sole immediate effect is the termination of pregnancy before viability is an abortion...." Abortion may not be performed as an end nor as a means. To put it another way, physicians cannot intentionally kill one person to save another.

On the other hand, Directive 47 states: "Operations, treatments and medications that have as their direct pur-

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PHOTO: CNS/J.D. LONG-GARCIA, THE CATHOLIC SUN

pose the cure of proportionately serious pathological conditions of a pregnant woman are permitted when they cannot be safely postponed until the unborn child is viable even if they will result in the death of the unborn child.” The most common example used to illustrate the meaning of this directive is the woman who is pregnant and is also diagnosed with cancer of the uterus. In order to preserve the woman’s life, the gravid uterus may be removed even though the infant will die as a result of the surgery. This would constitute an indirect abortion because the purpose of the act would not be to kill the infant.

The case in Phoenix calls to mind a debate I participated in 40 years ago regarding the proper treatment for preeclampsia in pregnant women. Church teaching said little on the subject; some ethicists held it was a direct abortion to evacuate the uterus. Ultimately it was decided that preeclampsia was a life-threatening infection of the endometrium and thus would justify evacuating the womb, even though the developing infant would die. In other words, we decided the recommended treatment was an indirect abortion.

Clearly, the case in Phoenix also calls for the distinction between a direct and an indirect abortion. This is the question the ethics committee had to wrestle with. Even though it is clear the surgery is recommended in order to save the woman’s life, would the surgeons be employing an evil means to achieve a good effect? In my view there is a difficulty in identifying the cause of pulmonary hypertension in this case and thus a difficulty in identifying the pathological organ. In the case of cancer of the uterus, it is not difficult to identify the pathological organ. It is the uterus. But, the cause of pulmonary hypertension is not clearly known.

Federal laws limit what can be divulged in regard to deliberations concerning patient care, but in a report later made to the bishop of Phoenix, the hospital’s ethics committee identified the pathological organ as the placenta. The placenta produces the hormones necessary to increase the blood volume in pregnant women; in this case, the additional volume put an intolerable strain on the woman’s already weak heart. Since the placenta is located in the uterus, perhaps it would have been more accurate for the ethics committee to designate that organ as pathological and thus compel its removal. The committee might have also investigated more closely the work of the moral theologian Germain Grisez, who has argued that the principle of double effect applies to cases in which both mother and child would die if the infant were not delivered prematurely.

The committee should consider writing up this case for future study by the Catholic bioethics community. There is nothing in the existing literature concerning treatment of

pregnant women who suffer from acute pulmonary hypertension.

## The Canonical Case


Sometime after the termination, word reached the bishop of Phoenix that an abortion had been performed a few months before in a Catholic hospital to save a woman’s life. How exactly he learned the details of a private medical case is still unclear. The bishop interviewed the chief executive officer of the hospital and Sister McBride of the ethics committee to ascertain whether she had approved the termination. Two weeks later, the bishop informed her religious superior that Sister McBride had been excommunicated because she had approved a direct abortion. Canon 1398 of the *Code of Canon Law* states an automatic penalty: “A person who actually procures an abortion incurs a *latae sententiae* excommunication.”

Yet questions remain. Did the bishop and his advisors clearly establish that a direct abortion had been performed? Did he or his advisors know the medical facts of the case, and did they know about the pertinent canons of the church for penal sanctions? Many people acquiring canon law degrees are well trained in the sections of the code concerning marriage law but seldom study in depth Section VII, “Of Sanctions in the Church.” I have been a canon lawyer for over 50 years and have to refresh myself on these canons whenever a case arises where they may be applicable.

Even if a direct abortion had been performed, the declaration that an automatic excommunication had been incurred is questionable. Canon 1321 states that the violation of the canon must be deliberate. Commentaries on this

canon stress that the people concerned must knowingly and willingly violate the canon. Did the people involved in the Phoenix case, mother, ethics committee members, or medical personnel, act deliberately? Did they set out knowingly

and willingly to violate Canon 1398? Or was their primary intention to save the woman’s life? Moreover, if a penalty is truly incurred, several of the following canons recommend exemption from or mitigation of the penalty depending upon the psychological state of the persons involved. And as Pope John Paul II’s encyclical “The Gospel of Life” makes clear, few people “willingly and knowingly” procure an abortion. Finally, if a penalty has been imposed or declared, the person in question should be informed that an appeal is possible and that the penalty is automatically suspended while it is under appeal (c. 1353).

The ethical and canonical norms of the church are a safe guide for the many tangled problems individuals face today. But they are not known to all (*per se nota*). Research, consultation, discussion and patience are necessary to apply them well. 

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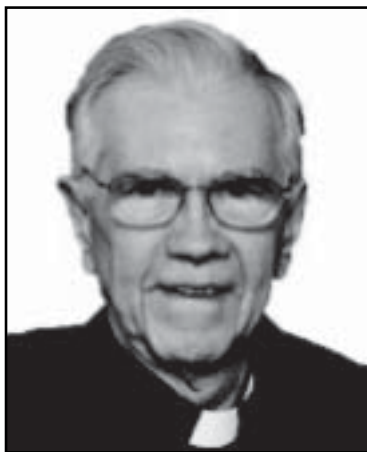
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Joseph Tetlow, S.J. is the director of Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House, where he gives retreats, workshops, and writes. He spent several years in Rome as head of the Jesuit General's Secretariat for Ignatian Spirituality, guiding the efforts of 250 Jesuit retreat houses. He was also a professor of Theology at St. Louis University and an associate editor of *America Magazine*. He has served on the Board of Directors of SLU, the University of Seattle, and Harvard's Institute for Educational Management.

Fr. Tetlow has written numerous articles and books. Among them are *Ignatius Loyola: Spiritual Exercises*, *Choosing Christ in the World*, *Making Choices in Christ*, and a commentary on the full cycle of Sunday readings in *America*.

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# Point Guards and Purpose

Why I still root for Bobby Hurley

BY STEPHEN MARTIN

**B**obby Hurley nearly ran over me last week with his Jeep!” the cute co-ed chirped as we stepped out of class into a bright September afternoon. She actually seemed a little sorry she hadn’t ended up on the hood, because then he might have noticed her. And back in the fall of 1991 few things meant more to students at Duke University than a glance from Bobby Hurley.

As the school’s sensational point guard, Hurley had led Duke’s basketball team to its first national championship just five months before. By April of the following year, he would be a full-fledged celebrity — Sports Illustrated’s cover boy, Most Valuable Player of the Final Four, the spark behind the Blue Devils’ second straight N.C.A.A. title.

I didn’t even know the guy and had never seen him in his Jeep. But during my freshman year at Duke, there was no one I envied more than Bobby Hurley.

My jealousy wasn’t new, either. In fact, it was in full flower before I’d even set foot on campus. When I was a third-string distance runner on my high school track team, Hurley, fresh off a legendary career at St. Anthony’s

High in Jersey City, was already a “star in the making” at Duke. Here was a guy who had everything I didn’t have—athletic prowess, fame and (judging by the reports leaking out



from campus) all the women he could handle. He also apparently had the one thing I did have, book smarts. A basketball magazine I had leafed through once mentioned something about his stellar grade-point average.

When my uncle, a Capuchin priest from Pittsburgh, stopped by the house one night for dinner, I greeted him with a plateful of teenage grievances. Why, I demanded, still smarting from the humiliation of the previous year’s biweekly acne treatments, did God give one guy so much? Why couldn’t I be like Hurley?

My uncle, calm and thoughtful as ever, nodded slowly. “Hmm,” he said. “The distribution of talent. That’s a difficult one.”

“The distribution of what?” I nearly shouted in the midst of my outrage. “Must the Catholic Church have a theological construct for everything?”

My uncle proceeded with an answer that, from the distance of 20 years and possibly some additional maturity on my part, made complete sense. Snared as I was, however, in the clutches of Albert Camus, self-pity and yearning for several girls I was too shy to ask out, I nodded, dismissed his advice out of hand and continued on my bitter way.

All these years later, I do take solace in this: there was a good reason to be jealous of Bobby Hurley. He did have something I didn’t have. But it wasn’t any of the things I thought it was.

## Lessons of Adult Life

It has taken me most of my adult life to figure that out. It was my Capuchin uncle who put me on the scent. Chatting at a family reunion several years ago, we touched on the shortage of priests. Vocations were still out there, my uncle told me, but our culture had gotten noisy and distracting, which made it harder and harder for people to hear the call. And it wasn’t just potential priests who were missing out. Increasingly, people in general couldn’t get a grip on who they were supposed to be. Even the simple notion of a calling, emanating from deep with-

STEPHEN MARTIN has written for *America*, *Commonweal* and *U.S. News & World Report*.

ART: RICK PARKER



in and filling our day-to-day lives with meaning, seemed foreign to many.

He's right. And only recently have I understood that when you strip away the highlight reels and the championship trophies and the chants from adoring students, that was Hurley's greatest blessing: he had a vocation. When Hurley stepped on the court, he knew exactly who he was supposed to be, and he didn't want to be anyone else. He was an artist, the author of stunning no-look passes and daring drives down jam-packed lanes, uncannily threading the ball through a thicket of flailing arms and legs. That kind of self-knowledge is very rare. It is actually worthy of envy. What happened next, though, was not.

Only a few months into his pro career, Hurley got broadsided one night at a Sacramento intersection. Not wearing a seatbelt, he flew 100 feet into a ditch. His injuries were staggering: two collapsed lungs, a fractured shoulder blade, broken ribs, a

damaged knee and, most seriously, a torn windpipe. He very nearly died at the scene. His grueling recovery and return to pro basketball made great headlines. But his body and his game were never the same. He was out of the N.B.A. within five years.

The time that followed wasn't easy. I would see articles now and then about Hurley. They said he lamented his lost skills. His focus had drifted. He had found some peace in training and breeding racehorses. But he still felt awkward outside the gym, one of the few spots where he had always felt comfortable and happy. That was pretty much all I knew about him, mortgage payments and deadlines having long ago crowded out my capacity for schoolboy jealousy. Then one Saturday afternoon, not long ago, Hurley seized my imagination once again.

Glancing up at the television I saw a promotional clip for March Madness. It showed footage of Hurley, skinny and jubilant, celebrating Duke's shock-

ing upset of undefeated U.N.L.V. in the 1991 Final Four. The clip faded and suddenly there, in the center of the screen, stood the present-day, middle-aged Bobby Hurley, his dark hair thinner and his body considerably thicker. "No way!" I thought. "That's Bobby Hurley? How did he get so old?" And then moments later: "How did I?"

We finally did have something in common, though no one would envy it—a receding hairline. And that wasn't all. Poking around the Internet for hints of what Hurley was up to now, I came across a story from a Duke sports magazine, one of those "Whatever Happened to That Guy?" stories about ex-jocks, the kind that often don't end well. But this was different.

Hurley, the story said, is Catholic. He doesn't like to think too much about the accident that put him at death's door and stole his career. It was, he said, "a tough deal." But he also said: "I can't complain. I believe God brought me back for a reason." The reason, it seems, is his wife and three young children—his new and biggest source of passion and inspiration. That, of course, is the same thing a lot of people say, especially when something else, like a very promising career, hasn't panned out. In this case, though, I believe him.

With two small kids of my own, I know something about parenthood too—its pressures and payoffs and frightening stakes, the sense of hurtling headlong into chaos, improvising madly through sleepless nights and summer camps, reports from teachers that make your heart sink one day and your hopes rise the next, meltdowns and hugs you never see coming. Creativity and fearlessness are mandatory. Who better to navigate it all than a wily point guard? And who better to root for than Hurley, a Catholic guy who found his purpose and lost it and found it again? It turns out I still want to be like him, but this time, finally, for the right reasons. **A**

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## SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING

*A look at three sitcoms in the post-Seinfeld era*

It began innocently enough in the summer of 1989, with a group of friends sitting in a New York diner, cracking wise about their lives and loves, a laugh track underscoring every quip. “Seinfeld” seemed no different from any of the situation comedies that had come before it. Yet, for better and most definitely for worse, the sitcom genre has never been the same.

Twenty years later, “Seinfeld’s” legacy as the first postmodern situation comedy still influences every television writer. NBC’s “Community” and FX’s

“It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” are but two examples of the complicated situation that is situation comedy in the post-Seinfeld era.

Both “Community” and “It’s Always Sunny” send up the “pack of ragtag misfits” narrative that’s been around at least since the time Moses told the Hebrews about the land of milk and honey. But while “It’s Always Sunny” fails because it goes against the narrative tradition from which it came, “Community” succeeds because it reinforces the lesson inherent in its genre, that grace can be found through fel-

lowship and shared experience.

The sitcom has always faced the demands of being a quintessential populist art form. Like its television sibling, the soap opera, the sitcom traces its roots back to the days of radio. “Fibber McGee and Molly” were the public’s favorite sitcom couple long before Ross and Rachel of “Friends” or Jim and Pam of “The Office.” Unlike the soap opera, however, which is dying a quick and ignoble death, and whose traces are found only within legal and crime-scene series, the sitcom remains as healthy as ever.

But it is no longer enough for a sitcom to tell a story with a few jokes; now both narrative and punch lines must be deconstructed, critiqued and referenced back to all previous TV shows in the span of 22 minutes. The



The cast of “Community”

PHOTO: HARPER SMITH/NBC © NBC UNIVERSAL, INC.

result is usually a cool, clever product, but it is missing a heart.

Within the sitcom there has always been a tension between the subversive and the sentimental. One can never stray too far in either direction without missing the mark, the resultant extremes being either the cruel hardheartedness of a "Family Guy" or the insipid inanity of a "Full House."

A new show that brilliantly negotiates the two polarities is ABC's "Modern Family," which takes on not only the sitcom genre, but the family melodrama. The show, which looks at the life of one extended family in Southern California, works because it upends our expectations about comedic structure and archetypes. For instance, the much younger, trophy stepmother with the low-cut blouse is characterized neither as villain nor as brainless bimbo but as the grounded voice of reason. (In one episode she intentionally loses at chess to her much older husband, in spite of her superior skills, in order to keep the peace.) "Family" also mocks the pathos of conventional family dramas like

"Brothers and Sisters" yet never flinches in the face of authentic moments of loving concern. Both its writers and actors can move smoothly from ironic snarkiness to honest conversation in



the blink of an eye. It is this kind of artistry that sets apart the best sitcoms.


"Community" is a show equal in caliber to "Modern Family." Completing its debut season on NBC, it gives a weekly glimpse into the lives of a handful of students at the fictional Greendale Community College. Joel McHale, late of E!'s flagship snarkfest "The Soup," leads the ensemble as Jeff Winger, an attorney of dubious repute who must return to school because his

degree was invalidated. Jeff winds up in a study group with, you guessed it, a ragtag pack of misfits, who include: the well-meaning but humorless Britta, played with finesse and skill by Gillian Jacobs, the socially deficient film student Abed (Danny Pudi), the single African-American mother Shirley (Yvette Nicole Brown), the former high school football star Troy (Donald Glover), the nerdy Annie (Alison Brie) and a remarkably toned-down Chevy Chase as Pierce, an oft-married, always obnoxious, moist-towellette tycoon.

While McHale is the leader of this multi-ring circus, he puts the brakes on his sardonic "Soup" persona to allow space for the other actors. Never does the viewer sense that any of the performers are pushing for a breakout performance. Rather, one is watching an ensemble at the peak of its powers, working together for the good of the show; as opposed to the primetime monstrosity of a handful of actors elbowing one another out of the way. Or maybe the show is just very well written.

The first-rate writing never compromises the inherent dignity of its characters for the sake of low humor. Too often in sitcoms, character development and complexity are sacrificed for a cheap laugh, destroying the credibility of character and to a lesser extent the show itself. Here each of the primary characters is handled intelligently by writers who appeal to the audience's sense of identification and affection—not, as is often the case, to their sense of superiority and revulsion.

In this regard "Community" follows in the fresh footsteps of CBS's "How I Met Your Mother," another show that emphasizes the importance of interdependence among colleagues and friends outside the structure of the traditional family unit. A throwback stylistically (it's shot primarily on a



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soundstage, using a laugh track), “How I Met Your Mother” seems like a relic when compared with more sophisticated shows like “Community” and “Family.” But like them, “How I Met Your Mother” is irreverent without being alienating. It reflects the caustic sensibility of contemporary culture, while demonstrating the necessity and joy each of its characters finds in being a member of a makeshift support network.

All these series tell of broken, lonely people hoping for something better. But instead of exploiting the characters’ weakness for the sake of a mean-spirited laugh, the shows celebrate the hope they find in relationships with each other and the grace they find in unlikely places. A recent episode of “Community” focused on a falling out between the culturally insensitive Pierce and the African-American Shirley. Instead of making a series of cringe-inducing racial jokes, the episode emphasized the solidarity of the two characters as they discover their commonalities as the senior members of the group. Most shows would not attempt such depth in character relationships and instead would yield to the infantile desire for a laugh.

Which brings me to “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia.” While not nearly as ambitious intellectually as “Community,” “Sunny” cannot live up even to its own mediocre aspirations. It proves a cautionary tale for those who equate a lack of content restrictions on cable television with artistic freedom. In “Sunny” all that freedom allows for is undisciplined, mean-spirited humor infused with foul language.

Like “Community,” “Sunny” deconstructs the traditional “ragtag pack of misfits” convention. But whereas “Community” plays within the spirit of the tradition and never loses affection for its source, “Sunny” mocks it with neither the humor nor the sophistication to support this endeavor. The show focuses on a group of childhood



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chums working at a down-at-the-heels tavern in South Philadelphia. “The Gang,” as they call themselves, consists of: Mac (Rob McElhenney), Dennis (Glenn Howerton) and Charlie (Charlie Day), along with Dennis’s sister, Dee (Kaitlyn Olson), and Danny DeVito in the now seemingly requisite comedic stunt casting as Dennis and Dee’s morally bankrupt father. “The Gang” spend their days insulting one another and setting new standards for moral repulsiveness. These people do not seem to like one another; I cannot say I blame them.

**ON THE WEB**  
 John P. McCarthy  
 reviews the film “Get Low.”  
[americamagazine.org/culture](http://americamagazine.org/culture)

The show would be helped by good writing and character delineation. As it is, each of the actors seems to be mouthing the words of a single stand-up comic. The show was conceived by its three lead actors, whose names are all over the credits. This might be part of the problem: the show feels like one big inside joke to which the audience is not privy.

The show’s graphic content and profanity will shock the first-time viewer. But after the shock wears off, the audience is left feeling as if it has watched the antics of a school bully, complete with the accompanying feelings of powerlessness and shame.

“Sunny” fails because of its contempt for its comedic ancestry. “Community” succeeds because of its affection for it. It is easier to present one-dimensional characters that repulse an audience within the parameters of a metanarrative than it is to create a group of lovable and loving, fully realized persons within that same structure. While “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” is emblematic of all that is wrong with sitcoms in a post-Seinfeld era, hope and health for the genre spring forth in the beauty of communion like that found in “Community.”

**JAKE MARTIN, S.J.**, is a Jesuit scholastic who teaches theology and theater at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Ill.

academy and the pew. He tells us in this theological memoir that his mother, like Hannah, made a pact with God. What he further discloses is that sons brokered in this deal are destined to pick up the work God left undone. Shaking up the status quo, as Hauerwas soon learned, was not always a comfortable task, but it turned out to be his lifelong labor of love. No GPS is provided, so one learns as one goes along “how” (not “what”) it is to be a Christian, how much one needs the friendship and “the presence of significant lives made significant by being Christian,” how the Cross of Christ indwells and endures suffering at the same time that it makes unrefusable demands on one’s allegiances and commitments. How Hauerwas deals intricately and personally with these themes is alone worth the price of this book.

For the author, an involuted route to becoming a Christian is complicated by a personality evidenced in these pages as arrogant, self-righteous, controversial and abrasive. There is a good amount of venting, too, most of all about his first wife’s mental condition and her fantasies and other aberrant behaviors. One hopes the venting was cathartic. To this reviewer it seemed

**BOOKS** | DORIS DONNELLY  
**BRICKLAYER’S SON**

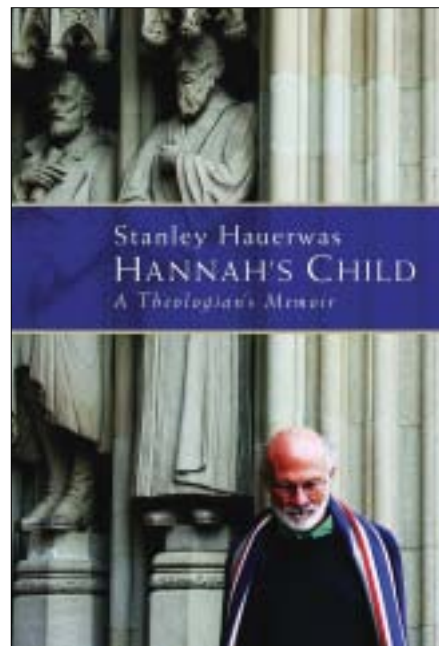
**HANNAH’S CHILD**  
**A Theologian’s Memoir**

By Stanley Hauerwas  
 Eerdmans. 308p \$24.99

The biblical Hannah made a deal with God. Her story, recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, is simple enough. She promised that if in her post-menopausal stage she conceived a son, her child would be dedicated to God’s service. Hannah’s faith was rewarded by the birth of Samuel, a future king of Israel. In return for making the unthinkable possible, she offered God a manifesto of praise. According to the theologian Stanley Hauerwas,

Hannah did what all good theologians must do. She used clear, crisp and utterly precise words to tell the barren, the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed about this God who knew no boundaries, and of God’s plan to overturn every artificial division by class, race, gender, social and economic status until a peaceable kingdom reigned.

A prolific author and professor of theological ethics at Duke University’s Divinity School, Hauerwas was named “America’s Best Theologian” by Time magazine in 2001, undoubtedly in recognition of his heavyweight contribution in word and deed to the



unnecessarily detailed. Human limitations notwithstanding, grace builds on nature, and abundant graces are offered to Hauerwas: a gentle father to complement a difficult mother; a prized son to offset a troubled marriage; and a series of impressive academic positions popping up just when some impolitic move (at Augustana College) or a disagreement with a chairperson's vision (at Notre Dame) or a squabble over an academic policy (at Duke) could have derailed his career. The situation at Duke was resolved amicably, so there Hauerwas remains, delighted with his students, his work and his dearly beloved second wife, Paula Gilbert. It bears noting anecdotally that during the interview process at Duke, Paula, as the director of admissions, was a dinner guest invited to vet whether Hauerwas's salty language "could pass muster in a mixed crowd."

About his students, Hauerwas writes that many are smarter than he. He says the same about many of his colleagues. He is a teacher, but a learner, too, and he generously acknowledges his foundational debt to Karl Barth as well as to inspiration from the bricklayers with whom he worked as a youth in his father's business in Texas, along with the many pastors and academics and friends who can all take some credit for this man's growth as a human being.

From James Gustafson Hauerwas latched onto an idea that became a trademark: character and virtues are crucial for the moral life. Hauerwas then independently developed a Christology that supported that conclusion. From Julius Kovesi via Iris Murdoch he learned that description is everything, that narrative and story are essential for Christian ethics and that this new approach gives vitality to a discipline that the conventional focus on decision and choice lacked. From the Mennonite pacifist John Yoder he learned that "non-violence is not a recommendation" but rather is constitu-

tive of "God's refusal to redeem coercively." It's just like God to leave freedom intact. And it's just like Hauerwas to remind us with specificity that the God he means "is not just any God," but the God who "has shown up in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Faith in a crucified Christ allows Hauerwas to continue his work with what seems like indefatigable energy. It also inspired him to argue that the "we" in a "we are at war" response to the events of Sept. 11, 2001, could not possibly be a Christian "we." One might suggest that such a challenge

**ON THE WEB**  
An interview  
with Stanley Hauerwas.  
[americamagazine.org/podcast](http://americamagazine.org/podcast).

was not a far cry from Stanley Hauerwas, age 7, who innocently challenged the etiquette of the water kegs available for bricklayers with one cup designated for white and another for black workers. Young Hauerwas drank indiscriminately from either one. The difference now, 60 or so years later, is that Hauerwas intentionally chooses to drink from the cup that unites us all as sons and daughters of God, no matter the consequences.

**DORIS DONNELLY** is a theologian at John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio, and director of the Cardinal Suenens Center there.

## WILLIAM J. BYRON MARKET MAVEN

### HIGH FINANCIER The Lives and Time Of Siegmund Warburg

By Niall Ferguson  
The Penguin Press. 576p \$35

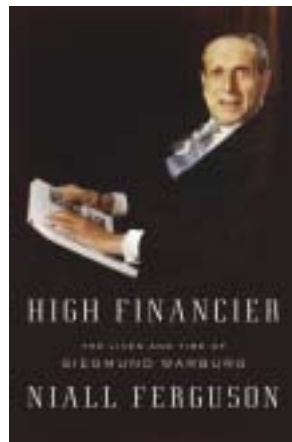
This is a biography of the man "who, more than any other, saved the City," writes the finance historian Niall Ferguson. The city is London, which was "saved" as a world center of finance after World War II and returned to eventual equality with New York and Tokyo in the front ranks of high finance.

The savior is Siegmund Warburg (1902-82), a German Jew and merchant banker whose roots in banking stretched back to the Middle Ages, but his practice of what he would come to regard as both the art and sci-

ence of banking took off when he settled in London in 1934 as a refugee from Hitler's Germany.

Any merchant banker's prime asset is his experience in sizing up situations and measuring risk. Warburg put his knowledge of finance in service to clients who knew, better than he, their own products and services. But he knew literature and history, as well as business, and had an interest in psychology, all of which contributed to his deal-making ability.

Warburg believed in the importance of integration for the advancement of economic activity. So, once established in England, he convinced governments as well as businesses of the strategic importance of cooperation. He earlier had shed his German nationalism and grew comfortable with an international outlook. Ferguson's access to thousands of



Warburg's letters and documents enabled him, as biographer, to let his subject speak for himself at all stages of his personal and professional development, which contributes to the interest and authenticity of this account. The result is a slow read, but the book sheds helpful light on banking and the personal qualities needed to keep bankers focused on the common good.

At the height of his career, Warburg preferred to think of himself as a physician. He saw banking as a kind of fee-for-service financial consultancy, as opposed to the lending and deposit-taking role of commercial banking with its reward system of interest and commissions. The physician listens to his patient. "Moreover," wrote Warburg, "a good doctor must have the courage to tell the patient unpleasant facts and to oppose the patient when the patient wants to do things which appear to the doctor to be unwise." His focus was always "quality of service and the courage to persist in giving well-con-

sidered advice, no matter how unpopular that might be at times."

Merchant bankers are, among many other things, merger brokers. Warburg played this role in 1958-59 as adviser to Reynolds Metals in the so-called aluminum war for control of British Aluminium Company Ltd. Success in the aluminum war put the Warburg firm on the map; it became a leader in the field of hostile takeovers.

There are similarities between merchant banks of old and today's investment banks that help companies and governments raise money by issuing and selling both equity and debt securities in the capital markets. They also offer financial advisory services for a fee (typically a percentage of the multi-million dollar deals).

Siegmund Warburg went into the family banking business in Germany when hyperinflation was raging. He saw inflation as primarily a political phenomenon caused by "governments that do not have the courage either to reduce their expenditure or to cover it by taxation." This conviction never left him. Nor did he ever lose his interest in the political side of world economic development. Ferguson writes that "Warburg's ultimate business objective was always to establish an optimal transatlantic triangle that would link together London, New York, and a European financial centre, whether Hamburg, Frankfurt or Paris."

He was influential in developing the Eurobond market, and the growth of this market, in Ferguson's view, "transformed the European capital market, forging entirely new institutional links and networks across national borders." Ferguson confers on Warburg the title of "father of the Eurobond market" and describes him as a "convinced proponent of European economic and political integration." Warburg welcomed the process of financial globalization that followed upon the birth of the Eurobond market.

The Warburg work ethic was

intense—hosting two client lunches a day in the bank's offices "in marked contrast to the prandial style at older City firms, where alcohol was plentiful and talking shop all but prohibited." He insisted on the regularity of directors' meetings and the "sanctity of written records." The Warburg system "was based above all on the written word." The tension at the heart of Warburg's management style was "between his insistence on regular meetings and written records and his fear of bureaucracy as the enemy of individual initiative."

Describing Warburg in his 70s as "a man on the wane" whose "perfectionism was slipping into pedantry," Ferguson sifts through the large collection of aphorisms that Warburg left for posterity and came up with several on the subject of leadership that were written in 1977-78:

- + It is one of the preconditions of good leadership to take as little notice as possible of mediocre people.
- + Too many people manage; too few people lead.
- + The hardest job for a good boss is to find a suitable successor for himself.

No suitable successor was found. After his death, the bank, S. G. Warburg & Co, expanded too aggressively from a merchant bank into an investment bank, had a near merger in 1994 with Morgan Stanley and was purchased by the Swiss Bank Corporation in 1995. S. G. Warburg & Co. disappeared, one observer said, because "those at the helm forgot to follow some of Siegmund's most basic rules."

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**WILLIAM J. BYRON, S.J.**, is university professor of business and society at St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia, Pa.

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**THE CHRISTIAN  
IMAGINATION**  
**Theology and the Origins of Race**

By Willie James Jennings  
Yale. 384p \$35

Being unfamiliar with author Willie James Jennings, I eagerly ventured into the introduction of his new book *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. I was told by Jennings that Christianity in the Western world lives and moves within a diseased social imagination. Jennings asserts that something went drastically wrong within modern Christianity and that the formation of Christian intellectuals is damaged and disassociated from reality. He adds that today's theologians do not think theologically about their identities.

To this day I cannot articulate the distinction Jennings is trying to make between "the Christian imagination" and "the Christian social imagination." It is only by reading his very dense book that I came to appreciate what drives Jennings's scholarship: the great sin of slavery that was justified, perpetuated and exploited by Christianity. Why this is not stated clearly in the introduction is a mystery.

I commend the author for the way he lays out the tragic story of slavery in the West. We are introduced to four historical figures whose names do not appear in our history books. They are Zurara, a 15th-century royal chronicler of Prince Henry of Portugal, José de Acosta Porres, a 16th-century Jesuit schooled in scholasticism, John William Colesano, an Anglican bishop from the 19th century who desired to preach and present the Gospel to indigenous peoples in their native language, and Olaudah Equiano, born in Africa in 1745, who experienced slavery firsthand. Jennings' sensitively

descriptive writing brings each man to life and draws the reader into their stories. They offer a lens through which to understand the tragedy of slavery.

Those who came to the Americas on behalf of their king-ly and queenly European patrons were incapable of appreciating the amazing peoples and cultures they discovered. This study lays out realities that must be honestly admitted and historically chronicled, for many of the abuses of the past are being played out in our time.

The conquerors found it necessary to destroy and control the landscape that provided food and livelihood to the Indians. The conquering Christians found it necessary to rename what they found, disconnecting places and stories from their roots. Stories and histories were lost forever. Zurara does indeed cry as he chronicles how sacred locales are "displaced." I applaud Jennings's insight that Christian theology became a theology of displacement—ironic, since its Jewish forebears were so sensitive to place. To this day indigenous cultures continue to be displaced for the benefit of govern-

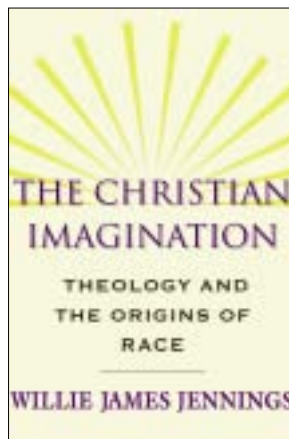
ments and private enterprise.

This book reminded me of the film "Black Robe," the story of a young Jesuit who travels to Canada to minister to the Iroquois Indians, especially the chapter describing the education and theological vision of José de Acosta Porres. Was it a good thing that the lives of so many were forever changed because of their exposure of Christianity? Many will answer yes, but Jennings's chapter on Acosta poses many doubts.

Especially noteworthy is the narrative on Bishop Colensano's struggle to respect the vernacular of the common people, but the chapter recounting the story of Olaudah Equiano moved me beyond measure.

Like so many others, I was deeply affected by the miniseries "Roots," and recognizing the power of the story, use clips from "Amistad" when I teach. The way Jennings shapes his research into a compelling narrative is truly masterful. The reader is at Equiano's side as he walks the long journey to the sea in chains. No doubt some of my European ancestors participated in his enslavement.

Jennings concludes his book with two scholarly chapters that explore how the Bible itself has been "misplaced" by Western Christianity, and the way by which the identity of the people of God is established in



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Christian scholarship. The reader will come away from these final chapters more critical of what they read in the Bible and with a new awareness of the significance of particular biblical translations. One must ask who was "left out" of the story of God's faithfulness and who was deemed unworthy of being made in the image and likeness of God. The final chapter is somewhat difficult to categorize, for as

with the introduction, Jennings pours in countless themes, including the significance of the biblical theme of exile.

The closing pages of this book are a wonderful synopsis of the ways colonialism and slavery dismantled peoples and places. Jennings is honest in his yearning for a Christian theology that affirms a different narrative from what has been offered in the past. He continues to bemoan theologians who do not

offer a clear Christian intellectual identity that is compelling and attractive. I am unable to commiserate fully with Jennings's longings in this regard, as I know and appreciate the work of countless honest, compelling theologians who continually challenge themselves.

**NANCY HAWKINS, I.H.M.**, is associate professor of systematic theology at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry, Rochester, N.Y.

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CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

## LETTERS

### Zero Programs

Re “Justice for Juniors” (Editorial, 7/15): Here in Maryland we have an incompetent Department of Juvenile Justice “functioning” in an outmoded statutory framework. It provides some services at the lower end of the seriousness scale. For youth who approach age 18 with past offenses, the placements and programs diminish to virtually zero.

Governors and legislators do some “blah-blah” about this around election time, but then do nothing of lasting value. Is that because many or most of the youth come from poor families whose needs can more easily be neglected by those we elect?

Also, understand that some youth may have vaulted themselves into adulthood and are not amenable to measures, programs and placements designed for juveniles. I am a retired juvenile court judge and frequently hear such cases when recalled to court.

DENNIS M. MCHUGH  
*Rockville, Md.*

### Visiting the Prisoners

It was with a sense of joy and hope that I read “Prison Breakthrough,” by Valerie Schultz (7/5). I was delighted that she came to understand the heart of prison ministry: cooperating with the Holy Spirit to create a community of faith with people for whom the very notion of a real faith-life and a vibrant religious community were either suspect or totally lacking.

From 1982 to 1991 I was the Catholic chaplain at Fishkill Correctional Facility in Beacon, N.Y. During those years I had the assistance

of bright, capable lay men and women from St. Mary’s Church in Wappingers Falls; St Columba’s in Hopewell Junction; and the great support of a dynamic couple who have made criminal justice their life’s work, Mr. and Mrs. Cypser of Katonah. The Cursillo movement inspired them to minister, and I am grateful to these men and women for their selfless ministry to men and women in prison.

Without their assistance, no doubt the ministry at Fishkill would have been very much diminished. They made it possible for us to have three Residents Encounter Christ retreats each year for nine years. It was a time of great grace for me, as well. I thank Mrs. Schultz for reminding me of those great years when I had the God-given opportunity to devote my younger life in ministry to those men in great need.

(REV.) THEODORE K. PARKER  
*Detroit, Mich.*

### Border Guard

Re “Dream On” (Editorial, 7/19): Prior to attempting to enact immigration reform legislation, it might be beneficial for the federal government to show some good faith by enforcing existing laws. What is the purpose of reforming immigration laws if they will be ignored, as existing laws evidently are? Whatever reform is achieved will almost inevitably irritate someone. In order to have any chance of success with compromise, the federal government must show that they will enforce what is enacted; and they must start with keeping the borders as safe as we can reasonably keep them.

MICHAEL S. COLLINS  
*Myersville, Md.*

### Voice of the Thankful

Thank you to the editors of **America** for recognizing that Voice of the Faithful is making a valuable contribu-

tion to the life of the church we all love so much (Current Comment, 7/19). Too many priests will not allow us to meet as Catholic laity in our own churches. Too many bishops regard us as the enemy. But we are not deterred, because it is essential for Catholic laypeople to be empowered and encouraged to become active and outspoken members of the body of Christ at this critical time in our life as a global community of faith. Everyone’s voice must be heard as we work to discern the right path forward. (Congratulations to the National Leadership Roundtable for the great work it does and to so many of the new lay-led movements across the church.) The Spirit is calling, and people are responding.

FRANCIS PIDERIT  
*New York, N.Y.*

### Truth With Clarity

Re “Rules of Engagement” (7/19): In 2008, at the Catholic Media Convention in Toronto, Federico Lombardi, S.J., the director of the Holy See’s press office, shared some observations about the pope speaking to the world and working with modern media. These included having a positive attitude toward the other; highlighting first and foremost the beauty of Christian life; trusting in reason and having patience; telling the truth with clarity as well as simplicity and avoiding ambiguity, intentional concealment or even reticence in dealing with the truth; and being yourself.

We Catholics have the opportunity to participate in the world with the benefit of values taught by Christ and his church as well as the graces of life in communion with divine providence. It may seem unduly simplistic, but living in love and truth in this world makes us fruitful.

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# Obedient Faith

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), AUG. 8, 2010

Readings: Wis 18:6-9; Ps 33:1-22; Heb 11:1-19; Lk 12:32-48

“By faith Abraham obeyed” (Heb 11:8)

In a rural village in Chiapas, Mexico, an indigenous woman reflects: “My whole life I was taught to obey. First of all, I obeyed my father and mother. At age twelve my father decided whom I would marry. My father and his father made the agreement. I had no say. I could not object that I didn’t even know the man to whom my father had promised me. My only choice was to do my father’s will.

“My father and mother told me to obey the commands of my father-in-law and my mother-in-law and my husband. He said I would only be happy if I obeyed. After I was married I tried to obey my husband in everything. He was the one who always made the decisions. I tried to be an obedient daughter and wife, but my father was wrong. I was not happy. My heart was always sad. I would cry out to God in my prayers, but the only answer I got was that God ordained that it should be this way.”

This woman’s story, along with the stories of others like her, is shared in the book *Con Mirada, Mente y Corazon de Mujer*. She, through the sharing of Scripture with other women who have learned how to read “with the eyes, mind and heart of a woman” discovered a new meaning of

obedience that took her far beyond her initial understanding. In this she is like Abraham and Sarah, as described in the second reading, and like Peter and the other disciples in the Gospel.

The reading from Hebrews emphasizes how obedience flows from faith in a trustworthy God. It elaborates how Abraham obeyed the call from God to go out from the place he knew “not knowing where he was to go.” All he and Sarah had to go on was God’s promise and their experience of generative power that was given to them by God. They set out obediently in faith, because everything they had experienced of God’s gracious goodness led them to trust the Holy One for whatever lay ahead.

The Gospel outlines how one becomes disposed to hear, to know and to act on God’s will. First, one must let go of fear so as to be able to receive the gift of God’s kingdom. This is God’s great joy: to find us unafraid and delighting in this indescribable gift. Obedience out of fear of a punishing God has no place among Jesus’ followers. Rather, obedience is the single-hearted response in faith to the One who is love incarnate and who frees us

to love in like manner.

Freeing the heart from attachment to anything but God’s love and God’s realm is the next step in obedience. Selling belongings and giving alms ensures that possessions do not become the treasure that grips the heart. Also needed is a sharpening of the senses, watching intently for all signs of divine presence and directives, through vigilance in prayer and attentiveness to the hungers of our world. Finally, when the master becomes the servant, there is a dismantling of systems wherein some are masters and others servants. The meaning of this parable becomes clear in the Last Supper scene, where it is enacted by Jesus himself.

Obedient faith that dismantles unjust master/servant



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How does contemplation and listening to the hungers of the world help you to discern God’s will?
- Enjoy God’s delight in giving us the kingdom.
- How does obedience in faith undermine subservience?

dichotomies is not an easy road, as women from the Bible study groups in Chiapas attest: “At first we felt guilty; we thought we were disobeying the law of God. It’s been a long process, but we kept talking and listening to one another. Now we know that it is not God who commands it to be so, but it is a matter of culture and education. We were not born to be subservient as we had been made to believe, but to be obedient to God, who wants us to be happy.”

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# Bodily Spirituality

SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY (C), AUG. 15, 2010

Readings: Rv 11:19; 12:1-10; Ps 45:10-16; 1 Cor 15:20-27; Lk 1:39-56

*“Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20)*

What happens to us after we die? People in every age wonder whether this present life is all there is. Some bury food and favorite items with their deceased, believing that they will need such things in the afterlife. Some hold that people are reincarnated in another life on earth. Christians place their hope in resurrected life, with Christ having already preceded us, then raising all who belong to him, as Paul assures the Corinthians in the second reading.

In subsequent verses of this same chapter, Paul speculates on what kind of body we will have at the resurrection. For Paul and other Jews of his day, there could be no existence without a body. Paul speaks of us having transformed, glorious, spiritual and imperishable bodies, bearing the image of the One who has preceded us in resurrected life.

Today's feast underscores the importance of bodiliness, declaring that Mary, “having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory” (Pius XII, “Munificentissimus Deus,” No. 44). For centuries Christians had considered that like other holy figures who had been taken up to heaven—Enoch, Moses and Elijah (Gn 5:24; Jude 9; 2 Kgs 2:1-12)—Mary also would have warranted special attention from God at her death. Many different legends grew up, but it was not until 1950 that Pope Pius XII declared infallibly that the Assumption of Mary was a dogma of

the Catholic faith.

In today's Gospel there is an emphasis on the holiness of the body as a vehicle for the saving life God brings to birth. Both Elizabeth and Mary exemplify an incarnational spirituality, whereby God's action in this world is known through bodiliness. With the infant in her womb leaping for joy, Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit and she pronounces a blessing on Mary and on the child she carries in her body. Mary, in turn, proclaims God's greatness with her whole being (the Greek word *psyche* in verse 46, usually translated “soul,” is not a separate part of the human, as opposed to the body, but rather refers to the whole self in all its vitality). Mary prophesies a new world in which there are no longer hungry or exploited bodies.

In a world in which the emperor claimed the titles “Lord,” “Savior” and “Mighty One,” Mary insists that it is God who saves lowly persons by a liberating power that undoes exploitative imperial systems. In a world in which people were enslaved for revolting against Rome or for debts from excessive taxes, Mary subverts systems of slavery by presenting herself as an empowered person who chooses to serve; she is not a person upon whom servitude is imposed. In a world where the majority struggled to

have enough to eat, Mary sings of a time when all who are poor are filled with the good things of God.

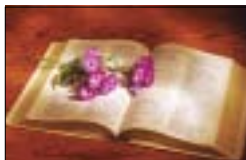
In a time when sexual humiliation and exploitation of women were rampant, Mary dreams of God lifting up to dignity all the “lowly.” (The Greek verb *tapeinoo*, translated as “lowly” in vv. 48 and 52, is used often in the Septuagint to refer to the sexual humiliation of a woman, as in the case of the rape of Dinah [Gn 34:2]; the abuse of the concubine of the Levite

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Give thanks for the body you have been given and pray for the gift of reverence for all bodies.
- In what ways does Mary's Magnificat invite you to embody now what Christians long for in the fullness of God's reign?
- How do care of the body and care of the soul go hand in hand?

[Jgs 19:24; 20:5]; Amnon's rape of Tamar [2 Kgs 13:12-32]; and the ravishing of the wives in Zion and the maidens in the cities of Judah by the enemy [Lam 5:11].) In the world to come, incipient already in the present time and exemplified by Mary, transformation includes the whole embodied person.

BARBARA E. REID



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