

America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

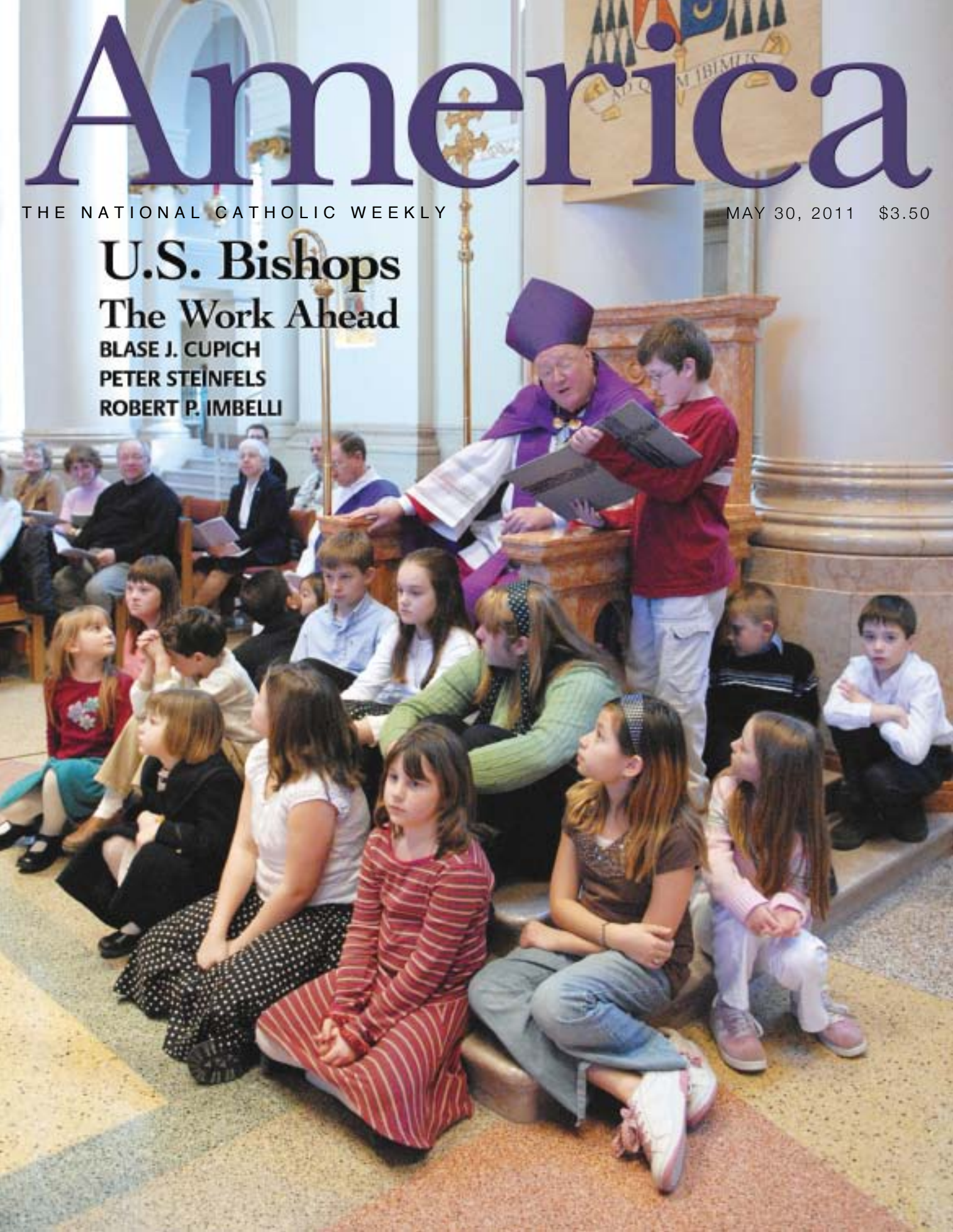
MAY 30, 2011 \$3.50

U.S. Bishops The Work Ahead

BLASE J. CUPICH

PETER STEINFELS

ROBERT P. IMBELLI



OF MANY THINGS

When I scanned the newspaper yesterday, I spotted an item about the artist Ai Weiwei, who was detained by Chinese authorities in early April for unknown reasons in an unknown location. He had been granted a brief family visit, the first since his detention.

I felt a roundabout connection with this item. Just the day before, a friend and I had visited a public display of some of Ai Weiwei's artwork—12 bronze sculptures of animal heads representing the signs of the Chinese zodiac. The bronzes were based on originals designed and cast for the Qianlong Emperor's palace near Beijing in the 1700s by Michael Benoist and Giuseppe Castiglione, European Jesuits. This palace was destroyed by a British army in the 1860s, but seven of the original bronzes survived. In these reproductions by Ai Weiwei I felt another connection.

When I first read about these sculptures, I recalled a piece published about the emperor's palace in *Company* magazine in 1994. That same year I had also written about spotting a Castiglione scroll painting in a museum in Taiwan and feeling a connection to it; this was the first article of mine that *America* published.

I love these connections. In Jesuit life, one finds them all over the world: buildings and artworks, books and place names that tell stories and challenge me with some heroes and lots of ordinary men working on mission. A church in Spain had stone reliefs showing scenes from the life of St. Ignatius Loyola; after the Society of Jesus fell out of favor in the 1760s, locals chipped off the heads of Ignatius in the scenes. (St. Francis Xavier, on the opposite side, survived; people liked him.) When the Soviets annexed Lithuania after World War II, they turned the great Jesuit church of St. Kasimir in Vilnius into a museum of atheism. (The church is back and very

much alive.) Rivals sought to obliterate the connections with what had been, but the connections are very strong.

Connections to family can be particularly strong. In October 2009, I was able to visit relatives on my mother's side in Ardara, Co. Donegal, Ireland. Some of us had met before in Chicago, but I had never seen the places or felt the sea air or heard the sounds of that beautiful part of the world that had so much to do with where I came from and therefore with who I am. I found the Breslin name everywhere and the Gallagher of an earlier generation.

One evening relatives and friends gathered in the cottage where my grandfather had been born in 1886; the peat fire burned warm and conversation flowed. The cottage is now part of cousin Lawrence's B & B, and I learned that it costs a lot to keep up a thatched roof! All the while I felt not just connected but very much at home.

Our liturgy has much to do with connection. The Easter season's readings move through the Acts of the Apostles, and we see our early heroes in faith saying words that Jesus had said and doing deeds that he had done. They kept the community together and brought new members in. They took to the road to make him known outside Jerusalem. They connected Galatians and Philippians and Romans with Jesus and with each other, as others later went to northern Europe and later still to Asia and Africa, to Pacific islands and America.

Connections great and small help us find balance and identity. They jog our memory and stir our imagination. Last Sunday my friend took a photo of me by the horse head sculpture, my Chinese sign. I do not know that I am so cheerful, quick-witted and popular as the Chinese interpretation of the horse says I should be. Still, no doubt I will look at the picture some day and remember and feel connection.

EDWARD W. SCHMIDT, S.J.

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Cover: Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan reads to young catechumens in Butler, Wis., in 2007. Photo: CNS/Sam Lucero, Catholic Herald

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ON THE WEB

Charles K. Wilber reviews HBO's "**Too Big To Fail**" starring William Hurt, right. Plus, a podcast discussion with Peter Steinfels and additional commentary on the **John Jay report**. All at americamagazine.org.



Bicycles for the Many

It has taken the United States more than 40 years to begin to catch up with Europe's bicycle sharing programs. What started in Amsterdam in the 1960s and was later copied in Paris, Copenhagen, Barcelona and other European cities took root in Portland, Ore., in the 1990s. Since 2008, though, major programs have been initiated in Washington D.C., Minneapolis, Chicago and Denver. This year Miami started a bike share for tourists, and later this year San Francisco and Boston will start pilot programs. New York City plans to make available 10,000 public bicycles in 2012. China, Mexico, Canada and Australia also have bike sharing. While these programs differ in target audience, size, sponsorship and method of payment, they allow users to take a bicycle from one "station," sometimes several racks of bikes parked off a main street, and leave it at another.

To succeed a bike share program must work with a city not only to mark bike lanes, map sensible routes and install bike traffic lights, but also to ensure that pedestrians, bikers and drivers negotiate them safely, lest accidents ensue and public support wane. Stations must be conveniently positioned with bicycles available when needed, and bicycles need protection from theft and vandalism. Still, the potential benefits are enormous: better health for those who exercise regularly, which means less spending on health care; fewer cars used for short commutes, which conserves energy and lessens air pollution. Over time bike sharing could create an urban culture of do-it-yourself transportation, drawing more people outside where they can see and be with each other, building community and enhancing the quality of life.

Et Tu, Superman?

"Truth, justice and the *American way*'—it's not *enough* anymore." So says the Man of Steel in the current issue of the venerable Action Comics's series. Has it come to this: Superman renouncing his U.S. citizenship? Apparently the hero who is faster than a speeding bullet, dismayed that an attempt to support demonstrators in Iran was misconstrued as an act of U.S. aggression, has decided that this is the best course of action. Unlike celebrities who are forever threatening to take up residence elsewhere when federal policy or personalities shift in a manner not to their liking, Superman appears to be a man of his word. "The world's too small, too connected," he says. Superman needs to be free to defend the universal common good, unconstrained by U.S. parochial interests.

Superman's embrace of internationalism has been deplored as a betrayal by some commentators. What's next, a U.N. seat for Krypton? This is another sign, they say, of an encroaching political correctness that is eroding American exceptionalism and reducing the United States to just another mere nation under Superman's benevolent gaze. It is hard to understand their complaint. It is not as if Superman's U.S. citizenship has not been dubious since the beginning. Rumor has it that he did not even enter the United States legally. Has anyone ever seen his long-form birth certificate? And what kind of name is Kal-El, anyway? So bon voyage, Superman; enjoy your fortress of stateless solitude. Let the free market catch the next falling busload of schoolchildren.

Peace Corps Problems

After leaving the Peace Corps in South Africa in 2009, Casey Frazee returned to the United States a changed woman, but not in the way one might think. After being sexually assaulted during her time as a volunteer, she went home with a desire to help other volunteers who have met a similar fate and to force the Peace Corps to recognize and adequately respond to cases like hers.

Between 2000 and 2009 more than 1,000 Peace Corps volunteers reported having been the victim of a sexual assault, a low estimate considering the fact that, according to a 2010 Peace Corps survey, close to 40 percent of those raped and 50 percent of those sexually assaulted did not report their attacks.

Now Ms. Frazee and other former volunteers who were victimized are speaking up, saying the Peace Corps staff took a "blame the victim" mentality and that the organization failed to educate volunteers about how to properly report an attack or seek counseling. Some were even encouraged to lie about what had happened to them.

The Peace Corps has committed to re-examining its policies on the matter, with the help of a newly hired victims' advocate, but Ms. Frazee's advocacy group is pushing for more Congressional oversight of the corps.

The good work of the Peace Corps should not be overshadowed by this news, but the need for reform cannot be ignored. Volunteers are often placed alone in remote villages. It is crucial that the Peace Corps maintain strong ties to these volunteers and provide a support network. The organization must look not only at its policy regarding sexual assault but at larger structural challenges to examine whether it is properly positioned to fulfill its mandate and to keep volunteers safe.

How Old Is Old Enough?

John and Mary are 19. This summer they will marry and work part time to pay college tuition. They vote, drive and sign contracts. John, in the National Guard, may go to Afghanistan. But he and Mary cannot share beers with college pals. Mary's brother Rick has a scholarship. On weekends, his buddies hit fraternity parties, prowl bars with fake ID's or, before a dry campus event, drink to excess at a private party. His honors thesis mentor will take him to dinner, but no glass of wine. Something is wrong.

Alcohol is a creature. As St. Ignatius Loyola says in the Spiritual Exercises, we should use creatures insofar as they help attain one's end. In moderation a drink can be a help to fellowship. In the film "Of Gods and Men," the monks in Algeria who are about to be martyred pass the wine at table. But used irresponsibly, alcohol ruins lives.

In 1984, influenced by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Congress passed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act, which imposed a penalty of 10 percent of a state's federal highway appropriation on any state that set the minimum drinking age lower than 21. The states complied, and drunk driving deaths of young people significantly declined. But this decline may also be attributable to stricter drunk-driving laws, seat belt laws and information campaigns against drinking and driving. Prior to 1984 a number of states agreed that since at 18 the young become legally adults, they should be free to drink alcoholic beverages. For those 18 to 21, however, the Minimum Drinking Age Act—aimed at a relatively small percentage of their generation, the drunk drivers—restricted this freedom for all.

Other effects followed the legislation. In reaction to the law or other changes in the culture, drinking began earlier, in suburban high schools, at 14. Drinking by the young went underground, on the youth culture's private turf, in fraternity houses and off-campus apartments. Vomiting, fights and cutting class on Mondays increased.

Posters in colleges counseled "moderate" drinking; shuttle buses toured bar districts to scoop up tipsy students; drunk students who called for help were given amnesty. Unlike their predecessors, students were binge drinking (five beers at a time, repeated over several days) deliberately to get drunk. Statistics on alcohol-related student deaths vary. Studies conducted between 2000 and 2005 counted the average annual "alcohol-related" deaths among 12 million students as between 36 and 1,400. Whatever the true death rate, the ban on alcohol made it a forbidden fruit, a

challenge to autonomy. By 1999 a growing number of university professors and administrators decided the law was not working.

In a laudable attempt to reduce drunk driving deaths among the young, have lawmakers created other problems? Do young people drink irresponsibly at least in part because the strict prohibition has also blocked an opportunity to learn from the prudent example of adults the proper role of alcohol? Since so many of the young drink already, are there not ways to encourage responsible drinking without a forced wait until the somewhat arbitrary date of their 21st birthday?

Do drinking laws separate freshmen from seniors who could be positive role models? Do they inhibit teachers' informal relationships with students? Meanwhile, other research has shown that students in living-learning communities—residence halls organized around academic interests, with quality peer and faculty interaction—drink as often as their peers, but consume significantly less.

In 2008 a group of college presidents led by John McCardell, emeritus president of Middlebury College, formed the Amethyst Initiative (Greek for "not intoxicated"), a statement that the age-21 law is "not working" and that its unintended consequences are increasing the risks for young people. It does not advocate a specific drinking age but calls for creative rethinking of the 24-year-old prohibition. One hundred thirty-six presidents, including 13 from Catholic colleges, of which three are Jesuit, signed.

The dialogue has raged for over a decade in *The Chronicle for Higher Education*, student newspapers and on "60 Minutes." Alternative proposals include: plan more living-learning communities; issue a provisional drinking license, after formal instruction and an exam, that allows the holder to drink at limited times and places; lower the minimum age to 19 rather than 18; break the fraternity system, the source of much abuse; raise the minimum driving age to 17; and serve only 3.2 percent beer in college pubs. State legislatures might allow select colleges to experiment with on-campus supervised drinking.

For those who listen to the college-age voices, one message is clear. They want to be treated as adults. The challenge is to find legal and cultural solutions that respect student maturity and welfare as well as the aims of higher education.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS

John Jay Report Depicts Progress But Cannot Isolate Causes

A report prepared by researchers from New York's John Jay College of Criminal Justice on the abuse of children by Catholic priests in the United States between 1950 and 2010 offers a complex portrait of the "causes and context" behind decades of sexual abuse and the sometimes ineffective or even negligent response of U.S. bishops to the problem.

Karen Terry, dean of research at John Jay and principal investigator for the study, told reporters at a press conference in Washington, D.C., on May 18: "There is no single cause of the sexual abuse crisis. The increased frequency of abuse in the 1960s and 1970s is consistent with the patterns of increased deviance of society at that time. The social influences intersected with vulnerabilities of some individual priests whose preparation for a life of celibacy was inadequate."

The study, five years in the making, reports that a comprehensive analysis of abusers did not shed any light on behavior or characteristics that could be conclusively predictive, though abusers generally suffered from "intimacy deficits" and maintained no close personal relationships before and during their years in seminary. Researchers pointed out that most of the abusers were graduates of seminaries in the 1940s and 1950s who were inadequately prepared for the emotional rigors of their lives as priests and the challenge of lifelong celibacy.

The study sweeps away the suspicion that an influx of homosexual men into

the priesthood helped propel the crisis. The researchers pointed out that reports of abuse began an abrupt decline even as more gay men became priests. Despite repeated emphasis on problems of isolation and loneliness as contributors to the crisis, the study still asserts that celibacy was not a contributing factor. What was?



The report suggests that a broad increase in deviant behavior in all areas of life in the United States—higher rates of crime, drug use, divorce and sexual experimentation and activity—was the backdrop to the growing problem of abuse in the 1960s and 1970s. Bishop Blase Cupich of Spokane, Wash., who is chair of the U.S. bishops' Committee for

LITURGY

More 'Reform of the Reform'

Pope Benedict XVI's easing of restrictions on use of the 1962 Roman Missal, sometimes called the Tridentine rite, is just the first step in a "reform of the reform" in liturgy, the Vatican's top ecumenist said. The pope's long-term aim is not simply to allow the old and new rites to coexist but to move toward a "common rite" that is shaped by the mutual enrichment of the two Mass forms, Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said on May 14.

In effect, the pope is launching a new liturgical reform movement, the cardinal said. Those who resist it, including "rigid" progressives, mistakenly view the Second Vatican Council as a rupture with the church's liturgical tradition, he said.

Anthony Ruff, O.S.B., expressed surprise at the cardinal's suggestion that more liturgical changes were forthcoming. Father Ruff teaches liturgy, liturgical music and Gregorian chant at St. John's University School of Theology-Seminary in Collegetown,

Minn., and is a primary contributor to the popular Pray/Tell blog. "It is quite astounding," he said, "to hear explicitly of the intention to undo the liturgical reforms since Vatican II and redo them in some more traditional manner, although we don't know yet what that means concretely. This gives liturgists much to think about and worry about."

Cardinal Koch made his remarks at a conference in Rome on "Summorum Pontificum," Pope Benedict's apostolic letter of 2007 that offered wider latitude for use of the Tridentine rite. Cardinal Koch said Pope Benedict thinks the post-Vatican II liturgical changes have brought "many positive fruits" but also



John Jay's Karen Terry, Bishop Blase Cupich and Diane Knight, Chair of the National Review Board

the Protection of Children and Young People, cautioned: "I don't think John Jay is saying that it's a cause of what happened. We're not trying to make excuses; we're not even trying to say we know what the causes are. We're trying to understand it, and the context helps us understand it. Explanations are not excuses."

problems, including a focus on purely practical matters and a neglect of the paschal mystery in the eucharistic celebration. The cardinal said it was legitimate to ask whether liturgical innovators had deliberately gone beyond the council's stated intentions.

He said this explains why Pope Benedict has introduced a new reform movement, beginning with "Summorum Pontificum." The aim, he said, is to revisit Vatican II's teachings in liturgy and strengthen certain elements, including the Christological and sacrificial dimensions of the Mass. He said "Summorum Pontificum" is "only the beginning of this new liturgi-

Perhaps the only unequivocally good news reported is that the church may have already gone through the worst of the crisis. John Jay researchers say the distribution of reports of abuse accelerated through the 1960s and 1970s but peaked in the years before the first media reports of sexual assault by clerics broke in 1985. Despite the apparent failure of the norms in Philadelphia, Terry said that efforts to contain the crisis through new procedures and elevated vigilance were working to reduce sexual abuse.

More rigorous diocesan and parish training appear to be paying off, coupled with improved screening of candidates and seminary course work that now includes a greater emphasis on "human formation," schooling candidates for the priesthood in human sexuality, "self-understanding" and in the development of emotional and psychological competence. Despite such positive signs, Bishop Cupich and Diane Knight, chair of the National Review Board, cautioned against complacency. "There is no room for fatigue or feeling that people have heard enough when it comes to

efforts to protect children," said Bishop Cupich.

The study included some criticism of the bishops but generally suggested that many of their failures in addressing the problem were a reflection of the times and its limited understanding of the nature and scope of the problem, coupled with poor advice from psychological clinicians.

That perspective has incensed advocates for survivors of abuse. In a scathing rejection of the analysis, David Clohessy, the executive director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said: "Predictably and conveniently, the bishops have funded a report that tells them precisely what they want to hear: it was all unforeseeable, long ago, wasn't that bad and wasn't their fault. It gives bishops even more reasons to avoid what they desperately want to avoid: questioning celibacy, married priests, secular laws, serious reforms or their own virtually limitless power as kings in a medieval monarchy."

A longer version of this article is available at americamagazine.org.

cal movement.

"In fact, Pope Benedict knows well that, in the long term, we cannot stop at a coexistence between the ordinary form and the extraordinary form of the Roman rite, but that in the future the church naturally will once again need a common rite," he said. "However, because a new liturgical reform cannot be decided theoretically but requires a process of growth and purification, the pope for the moment is underlining above all that the two forms of the

Roman rite can and should enrich each other," he said.



Cardinal Walter Brandmüller of Germany elevates the host during a Tridentine-rite Mass in St. Peter's Basilica on May 15.

More Evidence For Climate Change

The National Research Council of the National Academies released a report on May 12 that provides another addition to the scientific consensus on the reality of climate change and its significant threats. According to scientists and public policy experts who prepared the report: "Climate change is occurring, is very likely caused primarily by the emission of greenhouse gases from human activities and poses significant risks for a range of human and natural systems." The authors added, "The environmental, economic and humanitarian risks posed by climate change indicate a pressing need for substantial action to limit the magnitude of climate change and to prepare for adapting to its impacts." N.R.C. researchers acknowledged that there is uncertainty about the scale and severity of future risk, but argued, "Uncertainty is not a reason for inaction, however; it is, in fact, a compelling reason for action, especially given the possibilities of abrupt, unanticipated and severe impacts."

Pope Calls for Peace In Libya and Syria

Pope Benedict XVI called for a negotiated settlement in Libya and an end to bloodshed in Syria, where civil strife has left hundreds of people dead. Speaking at his noon blessing at the Vatican on May 15, the pope said he was following the conflict in Libya with "great concern" and was especially worried about the suffering of civilians. "I renew a pressing appeal that the way of negotiation and dialogue may prevail over violence," the pope said. The highest church official in Libya, Bishop Giovanni Martinelli of Tripoli, again called for a cease-fire so that civilians

NEWS BRIEFS

Catholics in England and Wales will be obliged to **abstain from meat** every Friday after a restoration of the discipline takes effect on Sept. 16, the first anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Britain. + "Things are worse than I thought," said Haruo Someno, a Passionist priest volunteer for **Caritas Japan** cleaning up a community damaged by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. "God is at work here, but finding out how is going to be a challenge that must be met." + On May 12 Mexico's Interior Ministry fired seven top officials after revelations that **immigration officers** had handed over migrants to criminal groups, who then demanded ransoms from victim's relatives. + A Vatican instruction issued on May 13 requires bishops and pastors to "respond generously" to Catholics who seek to celebrate the Mass according to the **Tridentine rite**. + More than 70 Catholic scholars challenged the Republican House Speaker **John Boehner**, who was honored at the The Catholic University of America's commencement, to uphold the church's preferential option for the poor as he frames his 2012 legislative priorities. + The **Melkite Catholic Church** has opened the Al-Liqaa ("the encounter") cultural center in Beirut, Lebanon, with a mission of "building bridges across a divided world."



Relief supplies reach Sendai

could "catch their breath." The pope said the situation in Syria required urgent efforts to find social harmony. "I ask God that there be no further shedding of blood in that country of great religions and great civilization," he said. "I ask the authorities and all the citizens to spare no effort in seeking the common good and in accepting the legitimate aspirations for a future of peace and stability."

Johnson Dialogue Continues

The harsh critique by the U.S. bishops' Committee on Doctrine of a Fordham University theologian's popular book was not meant to question the "dedication, honor, creativity or service" of Elizabeth A. Johnson, a member of the

Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood, N.Y., and the author of *Quest for the Living God*. So wrote Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M.Cap., executive director of the Secretariat for Doctrine of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a letter to Fordham University faculty members dated April 28. The letter was sent 10 days after 179 Fordham faculty members offered their support to Sister Johnson and urged U.S. bishops to "rectify the lack of respect and consideration your actions have shown." Father Weinandy suggested a review of a 1989 document governing relations between bishops and theologians. He said that review might help parties "see how well its provisions are understood and applied."

From CNS and other sources.

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Jesus as a Leader: Some Gospel Lessons

Efrain Agosto, Ph.D. Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT

What did Jesus Look Like? Art as visual theology

Ena Heller, Ph.D. Museum of Biblical Art (MOBIA), NYC

A Light to the Nations: America's earliest Bibles

Liana Lupas, Ph.D. American Bible Society, NYC

The Holy Land in Ancient Times and Present

Monsignor Robert Stern, JCD Catholic Near East Welfare Assoc., NYC

Verbum Domini: Scripture at the Heart of Church Life

Most Rev. Terrence Prendergast, SJ Archbishop of Ottawa, Canada

Translating Sacred Text in the Americas:

Past, Present & Future.

Phillip Towner, Ph.D. American Bible Society, NYC

Partnership in the Gospel

Reverend Gerard Lair, OSB Fordham University, Bronx, NY

Who is Jesus?

Reverend Timothy Scannell, Ph.D. St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, NY

The Challenge of Community

Sr. Carol Perry, OSU, Ph.D. Marble Collegiate Church, NYC

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La Lectio Divina: Tradici3n Eclesial

Hno. Ricardo Grzona, FRP, Ph.D. Presidente de la Fundacion Pan3, FLA & UBS, Miami, FL

Las Sagradas Escrituras, palabras del Dios viviente

N3ctor Garc3a Dir. del Instituto de Estudios Religioso y Pastoral Centro Cat3lico Carism3tico, Bronx, NY

Semilla en Tierra Buena: La Palabra de Dios y el crecimiento espiritual

Renata Furst, Ph.D. Assumption Seminary, San Antonio, TX

Conociendo la persona de Jes3s a trav3s de las narraciones de la 3ltima Cena

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Historia de la salvaci3n es nuestra historia

Reverendo Juan L. Calderon, STL St. Rocco Church, Union City, NJ

Jes3s nos enseña a ser humanos

Sindy Collazo, MBA, MTS St. Joan of Arc Church, Worcester, MA





What's in a Name?

As each of our children turned 1 year old, we planted a tree for him or her on our farm. Our twins Clare and Eva got their own willows, planted at the edge of the pond, and for Eli we planted a pin oak on the south side of our house. Six and three years later, respectively, the trees are still alive and thriving. Our children identify closely with their trees, and just recently they finally gave them names: Wheazy-Treezy Willow, Breezy-Freezy Willow and my personal favorite, Oakey-dokey.

These trees now belong to the fraternity of familiar, named trees, animals and places on our farm, such as the “secret field,” the “hugging trees,” “blackberry hollow,” “the old cherry tree” and a rooster I have been forbidden to butcher, since the kids took a shine to him and named him Fluffy the Roostery Chicken (a fate that may be worse than death).

Such naming may seem cute or quaint, but I have begun to see it as essential to the way my family and I live in our place. For that matter, names are part and parcel of being human. In the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam the task of naming the other creatures. Jacob and other patriarchs gave particular names to places of struggle and revelation. The risen Christ changed one grieving woman's entire perspective simply by saying her name, “Mary.” Abram, Simon and Saul took new names to mark profound turning points in their journey of faith, as do my Benedictine colleagues at

Saint Meinrad Archabbey when they make their monastic vows. Newly combined parishes often rename their community to reflect the new reality of their merger.

Names are important because they are connected to the deep human longing to belong, truly and authentically. At our core, most of us hunger to feel that we are a meaningful part of a greater whole, that we matter, that the 13.7-billion-year-old universe is not utterly indifferent to our existence. But we often feel anonymous and alienated, isolated from others and insulated from the natural world. This is true, I'm afraid, even in our churches, if the droves of spiritual pilgrims who come for study or retreat at Saint Meinrad are any indicator.

True belonging is not a nostalgic, parochial fantasy that globalization and the Internet have made obsolete. I have caught glimpses of it among the monks and students at Saint Meinrad, among those with whom I minister in my small rural parish and with family and friends and neighbors. But communion is not easy—certainly not in the modern developed world, with all its distractions and digitally enhanced narcissism, and I suspect in no time or place.

Names make belonging possible because they cut through the abstraction that leads to alienation. Names always embody particular knowledge that comes from being in relationship and from paying serious attention to the named. A priest remembers his parishioners' names not because he has

memorized entries in the parish directory but because he knows something of their story and has even become a part of it, baptizing their children or burying their parents. Fluffy the Roostery Chicken has a name because he lives on a small farm where children interact with him instead of being one among thousands of anonymous broilers in an industrial slaughterhouse facility, where my kids (or any visitors) are not allowed to set foot.

Particular names and real relationships do not come without conflict, chaos and heartbreak. And naming can certainly serve darker human impulses toward scorn (“calling someone names”), ego inflation (“making a name” for oneself) and

control. But what other way is there than through names to help bring about healing, to move beyond sound bites and shouting matches into authentic belonging?

Affection, tenderness, compassion and care rarely happen in the nameless, faceless abstract; this is the truth of the Incarnation. Christian tradition speaks not of a prime-mover deity far removed from our daily existence but of a living, loving, communal God—a mysterious God beyond all names, who nonetheless chose to take a name, Jesus, and so enter into an intimate relationship with the created order and all of its creatures and places. And this God, whose name we have been given to know, also knows ours: “I have called you by name; you are mine.”

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

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RESPONDING TO THE NEW
JOHN JAY REPORT ON SEXUAL ABUSE

The Bishops’ Priorities

BY BLASE J. CUPICH

On May 18 the National Review Board released a report titled *The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010*, prepared by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The mere mention of these two groups, the board and the school, working independently of the hierarchy to produce this report, is a ready admission that when it came to fully understanding and responding to the sexual abuse crisis in the U.S. Catholic Church, we bishops needed the help and assistance of others.

It is true that the report documents a very large drop in the number of cases of abuse in the mid-1980s, demonstrating that once we bishops realized what was happening, though tragically quite late, we could and did adopt strong and effective measures. Education about the problem and the establishment of safe environments to eliminate opportunities for abuse to occur have proven effective.

Yet just as the report reinforces what we have done and are doing right in facing the problem, it also calls for additional initiatives to address shortcomings so that the abuse of minors does not happen again in the Catholic Church.

While the bishops will have to give their attention over the next months and years to fully explore the implications of the report, there are several priorities that we cannot neglect. These include:

1. Keep potential abusers out of the priesthood. Rigorous screening of seminary candidates must continue. This means background checks and thorough psychological testing to uncover emotional deficiencies that could lead to abuse. Presently, the *Program of Priestly Formation* states that “any credible evidence in the candidate of a sexual attraction to children necessitates an immediate dismissal from the seminary.” But now consideration should be given to updating it to require training in safe environment with an emphasis on defining and maintaining appropriate boundaries between members of the clergy and children. There can be no exceptions to the rule that anyone who has not undergone safe environment training will not be allowed to work with children and surely should

PHOTO: CNS/KAREN CALLAWAY

MOST REV. BLASE J. CUPICH is bishop of Spokane in Washington.

not be ordained a priest.

2. Revise the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People as needed. The bishops have routinely reviewed the charter for needed updates. The task now will be to improve it further in light of this report. In revising the charter the bishops must look to any elements that need strengthening or clarification to guarantee that in every diocese any priest with an admitted or canonically proven allegation of abuse against him is no longer in ministry. Similarly, the charter's mandate that the diocesan review board is to advise the "bishop in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in his determination of a cleric's suitability for ministry" needs clarification, as does the significance of our "Statement of Episcopal Commitment," so that there is uniformity in complying with the principles of the charter.

3. Require annual ongoing professional education of priests.

The John Jay researchers found that there is no surefire way to predict who will be an abuser, but they did find that people who abused the young were under stress, often lonely and also frequently abused alcohol. Continuing education on how to implement safe environment programs effectively must be mandatory for priests, but so should ongoing professional development aimed at reducing, if not eliminating, the stressors. Particular attention needs to be given to the spiritual growth of our priests, since evidence shows that a sound prayer life is an important resource for dealing with stress in a healthy and mature way. Priests deserve this investment and the assistance they need to develop coping skills and outlets that do not include drugs, alcohol and sexual exploitation.

4. Educate parishioners. Right now, the charter requires background evaluations and safe environment training for anyone who has ongoing, unsupervised contact with minors. We need to expand the circle of those trained to maintain safe environments. All of our people should learn

how to recognize and report abuse of minors. The simplest and most efficient way to educate churchgoing Catholics is through parish bulletins and Web sites. In addition to regularly publishing information about how to report abuse, parishes, with the help of our Secretariat for Child Protection, should routinely give updates on how best to maintain and improve their safe environment programs.

5. Emphasize the boundaries that should exist between an adult and a minor. In recent years we have seen reports to dioceses and civil authorities of boundary violations, like

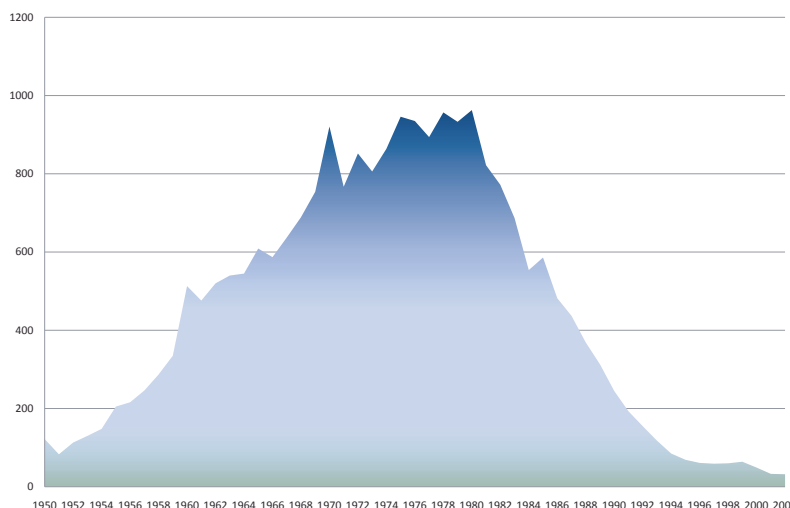
placing a hand on a child's knee, wrestling with a child or sharing alcohol with a minor. Professionals recognize that such touching and interaction often are first steps in grooming, a process by which sexual abusers test how far they can go in breaking down natural barriers between an adult and a child. Today's young people are appropriately trained to report any interactions that make them uncomfortable. Whether or

not these actions are associated directly with or lead to sexual abuse of minors, such violations of their personal space disconcert them and are not harmless. Clear and specific codes of conduct about adult-minor interaction, banning such boundary violations, should be an integral part of the life and activity of every parish.

6. Recognize the extent of the problem of sexual abuse of children. The John Jay study points out

that sexual abuse of minors occurs in virtually every organization where adults are in a mentoring relationship with children. Saying this should in no way divert attention from the problem of abuse in the church, as the church should be held to a

higher standard. But the church should care about what happens in all schools, sports teams and youth organizations because they too are vulnerable to abusers in their ranks. The point is that in face of the overwhelming evidence that sexual abuse occurs in all groups serving youth, the entire adult population in this country must address the challenge of protecting children in a collaborative and unified way.



From the new John Jay report: Incidents of Sexual Abuse by Year of Occurrence, 1950-2002

ON THE WEB

Additional commentary on the John Jay report. americamagazine.org

7. Monitor one another. It is tragic that so many abusers molested children over the years without others suspecting it. Perhaps members of the clergy and other adults who suspected that something was wrong decided to mind their own business. All who observe untoward behavior need to take their concerns to people in authority. This is not a matter of “ratting someone out” or getting someone in trouble; it is a matter of child safety.

8. Listen intently, respond forthrightly. Too often the first response of administrators when they hear of a problem is to hope it goes away. This approach cannot guide the handling of suspected sexual abuse of children. Reports of suspicions need to be addressed immediately and directly. Waiting for a few more reports or incidents to surface is like not dealing with a serious contagious illness until a whole classroom full of children comes down with it. Leaders also need to recognize that in many cases it takes a long time for a person to articulate anything about such a sensitive topic as sexual activity. Leaders need to listen not just to the words people speak but for the emotions behind the words and the body language that communicates what is not said. Church leaders need to send clear messages, especially to children, that they will listen sympathetically and act decisively when faced with sexual abuse of a child.

9. Place this crisis in perspective. Given that the existence of abuse of just one child is horrific, it is hard to feel that there has been progress in U.S. society in this matter. But there has been. John Jay statistics show a decline in sexual abuse of young people in recent decades, especially in the church. It is arguable that the church is doing better in this regard because of the intense emphasis on practical education through safe environment programs for both young people and adults. The media’s scrutiny of the church has probably kept leaders from regressing and yielding to “charter fatigue.” However one characterizes what we have accomplished, the fact remains that the church cannot stop taking precautions.

Perspective also is needed when priests are falsely accused and then exonerated. The charter calls for efforts to restore the reputation of priests falsely accused. Admittedly, the percentage of those falsely accused is small, but any false accusation is damning in the public eye. If a bishop and diocesan structures, like review boards and victim assistance offices, have been evenhanded in dealing with victim/survivors and the public, the bishop is more apt to be judged credible when he states that an accused cleric has been found not guilty and is worthy of an assignment in a diocese.

10. Watch for and correct distorted attitudes about the priesthood. Clericalism is a form of elitism, in which some are viewed as having special rights and privileges. It spawns

an arrogance that results in some people receiving less respect than others; that lets some people be objectified and used and, soon, tragically abused. We Catholics have been in the forefront in defending the dignity of the human person. Clericalism is a direct violation of human dignity. In the case of child abuse, it is an attitude that has grown deaf to what the Scriptures tell us about the special place children have in God’s kingdom. They are called to the front of the line as Jesus did when he said, “Let the little children come to me” and warned that it would be better to have a millstone strung around one’s neck and be thrown into the sea than to be guilty of harming a child. When we realize how highly God holds children, it is hard to do anything but respect and cherish them and to abhor anything that uses and abuses them.

The release of the John Jay study is a marker. It is a jumping-off point from which the Catholic Church and especially its leadership must continue to take steps to show that it will be steadfast in addressing the sexual abuse of minors. This is not a time for the bishops to sit back and applaud themselves for getting a handle on a shameful moment in church history. If anything, the church’s leadership must now step forward and give new vitality to its promise to protect and its pledge to heal. This will require on the part of the bishops a great deal of humility, the kind required to admit that we needed the help provided by the National Review Board, John Jay College and so many others. It is also the kind of humility expressed in the confession of faults nearly a decade ago by Bishop Wilton Gregory, then president of the bishops’ conference:

Our God-given duty as shepherds of the Lord’s people holds us responsible and accountable to God and to the church for the spiritual and moral health of all of God’s children, especially those who are weak and most vulnerable. It is we who need to confess, and so we do.

We are the ones, whether through ignorance or lack of vigilance or, God forbid, with knowledge, who allowed priest abusers to remain in ministry and re-assigned them to communities where they continued to abuse.

We are the ones who chose not to report the criminal actions of priests to the authorities, because the law did not require this. We are the ones who worried more about the possibility of scandal than bringing about the kind of openness that helps prevent abuse.

And we are the ones who, at times, responded to victims and their families as adversaries and not as suffering members of the church.

We should keep close to our hearts the humility and deep remorse expressed in these words nearly a decade ago. The children deserve no less. **A**

Voice Lessons

Weighing the moral authority of bishops

BY PETER STEINFELS

When a national conference of Catholic bishops habitually speaks with a common voice, does that undermine the leadership of individual bishops? The question has been raised ever since the Second Vatican Council gave those conferences official status and important although limited authority. It was raised in particular by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, who worried not only that such conferences could become a vehicle for nationalism but that their consensus statements might quell the uncompromising views of courageous bishops. He was thinking, of course, of the experience of Nazi Germany.

To my knowledge, neither the present pope nor any historian has yet offered evidence that a weaker conference of German bishops would have resulted in a stronger Catholic witness against the Nazi regime. But the question about the relationship between the collective and individual voice of bishops is a wider one. It has certainly been raised regarding the United States.

By most accounts, during the 1970s and 1980s the National Conference of Catholic Bishops here became a much more effective and influential presence in Catholic life and American society. Not everyone was pleased with this development, most visibly conservative Catholics unhappy with the major pastoral letters that the bishops' conference issued on the morality of nuclear defense in 1983 and on American economic justice in 1986. One unhappy conservative at the time was George Weigel, who has recently claimed, "As the conference's voice increased, that of individual bishops tended to decrease."

Mr. Weigel, the quasi-official biographer of Pope John Paul II and a prominent commentator in both Catholic and secular media on things Catholic, made that claim last February in an article in *First Things* announcing that the nation's bishops were at long last emerging from the grip of a "Bernardin Machine." From 1968 to 1972, then-Bishop Joseph Bernardin served as general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; as archbishop of Cincinnati he was president of the conference from 1974 to 1977; and as cardinal archbishop of Chicago he completed work on the conference's nuclear defense pastoral and later articulated the



Bishops and priests arrive at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York to attend a Mass celebrated by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008.

"consistent ethic of life." Mr. Weigel argued that the "Bernardin Machine" had condemned the church to a weak-kneed accommodation to the culture. His article, in my view, is a gross distortion of the past and a wrongheaded prescription for the future. I criticized its claims and not-so-covert political agenda in the May 20 issue of *Commonweal*.

Consider again that sentence, "As the conference's voice increased, that of individual bishops tended to decrease." The formula is catchy, but is it true? George Weigel provides no evidence—evidence that the voice of individual bishops actually decreased during Cardinal Bernardin's heyday; evidence that, if it did decrease, the cause was the strengthening of the national conference. The claim, like others in his article, is pure speculation.


But the question he raises, even if polemically, is a good one. Is there an inverse relationship between the effective leadership of the bishops' conference and that of individual bishops? Is this a zero-sum game, with only so much "voice" to go around? Or, on the contrary, is it possible that the stronger the voice of the bishops collectively, the stronger the voice of most bishops individually and locally?

What exactly is meant by voice, anyway? Credibility, moral authority, effective leadership? And how does one gauge whether it increases or decreases—not just for a few prominent bishops but for the great majority of the several

PETER STEINFELS is the co-director of the Center on Religion and Culture at Fordham University in New York.

hundred bishops, especially the heads of the nearly 200 dioceses and archdioceses in the United States? Measurement is not going to be easy.

Undoubtedly, the emergence after the council of a working bishops' conference with its own elected officers diminished the special status of the nation's handful of cardinals. And there is no question that various Vatican officials have lamented this fact. From their point of view, it is naturally



Is there an inverse relationship between effective leadership of the bishops' conference and that of individual bishops?

appealing for the intermediaries between Rome and the American bishops to be individuals whom Rome had elevated rather than ones the bishops elected. Sometimes Vatican officials have also set themselves up as defenders of the individual bishop's rights and responsibilities against the workings of the conference, and no doubt their theological concern was sincere. It is also possible to see in this defense something akin to a chief executive officer's preference for bargaining with an individual worker rather than a union. Mr. Weigel's formula seems to echo these views.

Gaining a Hearing

In *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (2003), I argued that during the period toward the end of the council and immediately afterward, the "voice" of the church was largely sounded not by bishops but by outspoken individuals, usually members of the clergy, who gained media attention for their highly visible roles in civil rights or antiwar protests, in opposing the reformed liturgy or in criticizing teachings on sexuality. The roster of these clergymen could include such different individuals as Hans Küng, Charles Curran, James Groppi, Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Gomma de Pauw, William DuBay or even, in a far more

establishment mode, Theodore Hesburgh.

During the 1970s and 1980s, however, as the bishops' conference got its sea legs as an organization, it again placed the hierarchy at the helm of American Catholicism, opposing abortion, conducting nationwide hearings for the bicentennial year of 1976 and stirring national debates with those pastoral letters on nuclear armaments and economic justice. It was my impression that these developments, certainly in comparison with the preceding years, strengthened rather than diminished the "voice" of the vast majority of bishops locally as well as nationally.

Maybe I was wrong. Consider some preliminary work that one church historian has done on the impact on American Catholicism of controversial medical ethics cases during those crucial decades. James McCartin, a Seton Hall professor and author of *Prayers of the Faithful: The Shifting Spiritual Life of American Catholics* (Harvard, 2010), has been looking at cases involving decisions about end-of-life care, such as that of Karen Ann Quinlan in the mid-1970s and of Claire Conroy and Nancy Cruzan in the 1980s. Although local bishops offered measured "complex moral formulations" in such cases, those statements were drowned out by a pro-life movement roused by the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and viewing abortion and euthanasia as twin evils threatening American society. "A growing news media would make pro-life activists the predominant Catholic voice in public debates about terminal illness and dying," Mr. McCartin said in a paper given recently; and eventually "as Catholic moral theology became swept up in the emerging culture wars of the 1970s, the authority of local bishops to pronounce on matters of crucial moral significance within their dioceses was significantly diminished." Local bishops "would be made to cede public attention and authority to national organizations which frequently articulated moral positions lacking the characteristic nuance of Catholic moral reflection, positions that could be easily articulated to advance a point in the culture war."

That, of course, is a very different narrative from Mr. Weigel's; but it may not be the full story either. Bishops might have simultaneously lost "voice" in some areas but gained it in others. And how does one factor in developments like new attitudes and appointments from Rome under John Paul II or

the mounting disaffection of much of the theological guild or the growth of aggressive and often well-funded organizations on both the left and the right that systematically denounced the bishops on questions of social policy, peacemaking,

sexuality, abortion, ordination of women and married men, liturgical language, catechetics and so on?

I doubt that anyone would dispute that the sexual abuse scandal has done drastic damage to the voice of bishops over

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the last two decades. Before the scandal it would have been scarcely imaginable that a conservative Catholic state legislator in a highly Catholic state would defend budget cuts against a bishop's complaint that they hurt the vulnerable by calling the bishop a "pedophile pimp." Yet of the many causes of the sexual abuse scandal, one of them was certainly not that the bishops' conference was too strong. Just the opposite. Efforts by the conference to address sexual abuse by clergy were consistently undermined by both the limits of the conference's structure and authority and by the impediments raised by individual prelates. A more muscular conference two decades ago would probably have led to greater moral authority for bishops today.

The U. S. bishops' conference appears weaker now than in the 1980s or even the 1990s. Its budget, staff, energy and confidence have been significantly reduced. This has indeed increased the visibility and influence of both the leading cardinals and of a few bishops who garner media attention by taking confrontational stances. But the idea that the voice of the episcopacy as a whole, whether collectively or individually, has been thereby strengthened is certainly questionable. So what does reinforce or erode their ability to gain a hearing among Catholics or the general public? I assume that the bishops are as interested in that puzzle as anyone else is. I hope they will make that a topic of serious study and not polemical opinion. A

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEATER AND THEOLOGY SHARE THE STAGE?

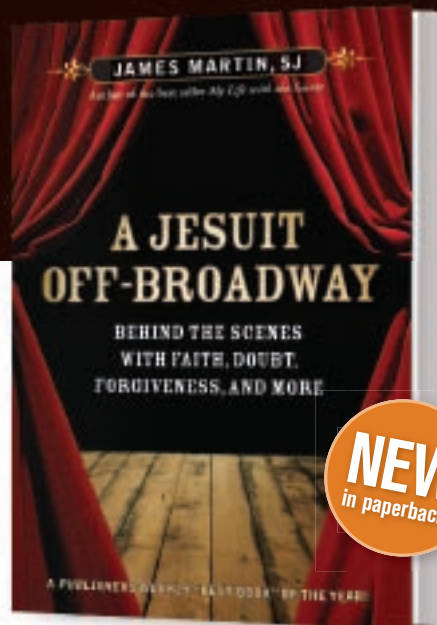
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Continue the Conversation

Suggestions for theologians and bishops in search of common ground

BY ROBERT P. IMBELLI

On June 9, the 66th annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America will open in San Jose, Calif. This year's theme, "All the Saints," will be explored in four major addresses and numerous seminar sessions, drawing upon diverse biblical, historical and systematic perspectives. A glance at the program conjures a Joycean sense of "here comes everybody!" Yet the striking pluralism is framed by two events that embody a union that is more than merely symbolic. The convention will open with a prayer service followed by a welcome and reflection by the diocesan bishop, and the high point of the last full day will be the celebration of the Eucharist. These traditional identity-markers will no doubt assume a new relevance and pose a new challenge this year, for they will be enacted in the wake of heightened concerns among theologians and bishops.

On March 24 the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine issued a critical statement concerning *The Quest for the Living God*, a book by a former president of the Catholic Theological Society, Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J. Shortly after, on April 8, the board of the society responded with a statement of its own, lamenting among other things the shortcomings of the process by which the committee's discernment was reached. This in turn evoked, 10 days later, a letter from Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Doctrine. The letter, "Bishop as Teacher," spoke forcefully of the particular responsibilities of bishops in matters of doctrine and of the

respective roles and responsibilities of bishops and theologians in the church.

Yet, despite apparent disagreements, there clearly exist shared understandings and commitments. Thus the C.T.S.A. statement asserts: "We are conscious of the complementary but distinct vocations of the theologian and the



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Magisterium and are open to further conversation with the Committee on Doctrine regarding the understanding of our theological task." For his part, Cardinal Wuerl, while acknowledging perhaps inevitable tensions, insists: "Nevertheless, when good will is present on both sides, when both [bishops and theologians] are committed to the truth revealed in Jesus Christ, their relationship can be one of profound communion as together they seek to explore new implications of the deposit of faith."

Three Topics for Discussion

In an effort to further this needed conversation I suggest three topics that merit the careful attention of bishops and theologians and that require discernment and dialogue.

ROBERT P. IMBELLI, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, teaches theology at Boston College. He was a member of the board of the Catholic Theological Society of America from 1999 to 2001 and was on the founding committee of Cardinal Bernardin's Catholic Common Ground Initiative.

The first is a renewed affirmation that theology is an ecclesial discipline and that the vocation of the theologian is a distinctively ecclesial one. Catholic theology's prime locus is in the midst of the ecclesial assembly. In light of the words of the bishops and of theologians cited above, this should seem self-evident. But (to borrow Blessed John Henry Newman's terms) it is one thing to affirm this "notionally" and another to "realize" fully its import and implications.

A crucial factor that complicates this realization is that the social location of theology in the United States has shifted noticeably since the Second Vatican Council, from seminaries to universities. Though this shift has brought undoubted gains, it has also brought accompanying losses. I think in particular of the loss of a shared liturgical context for the doing of theology. One creative initiative might be for the local bishop and area theologians to meet at least annually in the context of both liturgical celebration and theological dialogue.

A distinguishing element of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, launched by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, was its insistence upon setting discussions within the common space of liturgical celebration.

A second potentially fruitful topic for bishops and theologians could be the intrinsic connection among three crucial dimensions of the church's mission: kerygma, catechesis and theology. After Vatican II the refrain has sometimes sounded, "We're doing theology, not catechetics." As an appeal to respect the integrity of the theological task, this can be understandable. But it suffers a twofold distancing from ecclesial reality. It can insinuate a divorce between theology and the proclamation of the Gospel. If theology, as most accept, is "faith seeking understanding," then it can scarcely prescind from the content of that faith. In the First Letter of Peter (often cited by Pope Benedict), we read: "In your hearts reverence Christ as Lord and always be prepared...to give an account [*logos*] of the hope that is in you." That account is always based upon the hope that is in Christ Jesus—the hope that is Christ Jesus.

Furthermore, the divorce of catechetics and theology appears in the present ecclesial reality to be hopelessly abstract. A spectrum of commentators from "traditionalist" to "progressive" concurs on the dire situation of biblical and theological illiteracy afflicting young Catholics. The common good of the community surely requires renewed collaboration between bishops and theologians to address the crisis. A chorus of lament or, worse, a defensive assigning of blame is hardly a promising response.

The social location of theology in America has shifted noticeably since Vatican II, from seminaries to universities.

A third topic, the most crucial, follows from the first two. The outstanding theologians who collaborated closely with the bishops in producing the wonderful documents of Vatican II affirmed with one accord the unique revelation of God to which the Bible bears witness. Hence, the council affirms that "the study of sacred Scripture" should be "the soul of all theology." And though the direct reference is to priestly formation, the new social situation of theology, referred to above, only gives wider relevance to the following declaration of the council: "Under the light of faith and with the guidance of the Church's teaching authority, theology should be taught in such a way that students will accurately draw Catholic doctrine from divine revelation, understand

that doctrine profoundly, nourish their own spiritual lives with it..." ("Optatam Totius," No. 16).

The council's clarion call to place the study of Scripture at the heart of the theological task is compromised, however, if

study of the Bible ceases in fact to be a wrestling with Scripture as privileged witness to divine revelation. Unhappily, one observes a tendency in some circles for biblical study to become the dissecting of a fascinating and influential ancient text that is no longer *sacra pagina* but, rather, *pagina ordinaria*. In such a situation theology inevitably morphs into religious studies, and burdens are heaped on the few courses in systematic theology that they are unable to bear.

To press the issue further: this trend threatens the Christological substance of the faith that seeks fuller understanding—understanding, not relativizing, much less superseding.

The eminent New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson does not recoil from warning of "Christological collapse" in contemporary Catholicism. He has called both bishops and theologians to account—the former for pastoral negligence, the latter for cultural capitulation. Clearly this is not meant to be an across-the-board indictment. But it is a *cri de coeur* that both groups do well to heed. (See Johnson's essay "On Taking the Creed Seriously," in *Handing on the Faith: The Church's Mission and Challenge*, edited by Robert P. Imbelli, 2006.)

Johnson offers a salient recommendation. He insists: "Theologians must be willing to read Scripture in ways other than historically." (I take it that among theologians he would include Catholic scholars of sacred Scripture.) This appeal resembles the attempt of Pope Benedict XVI in the two volumes of *Jesus of Nazareth* to promote a

“Christological hermeneutic.” The aims and implications of such a hermeneutic—reading all of sacred Scripture in the light of its fulfillment in the risen Christ—could serve as a prime topic for discernment when bishops and theologians meet.

Beyond Polarization

Toward the end of its statement, the board of the Catholic Theological Society quotes cogently from Vatican II’s “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.” The passage reads, in part: “It is for God’s people as a whole, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and especially for pastors and theologians, to listen to the voices of our day, discerning them and interpreting them, and to evaluate them in the light of the divine Word, so that the revealed truth can be increasingly appropriated, better understood and more suitably expressed” (No. 44). This is a fine expression of the common though differentiated task of bishops and theologians.

But the constitution goes on in its very next paragraph, the conclusion and summation of the entire first part, to give a precise Christological specification of that “divine Word” and “revealed truth”: “For the Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things” (No. 45).

The recent beatification of John Henry Newman may spur a providential renewal of serious exchange between bishops and theologians. Three aspects of Newman’s theological-pastoral program are propitious in this regard. First is his great reverence for the episcopal office. Those who know Newman’s writings realize that such reverence does not proceed from uncritical adulation, but from theological conviction.

Second is Newman’s appreciation for the indispensable place of theology within the complex and creative triangle of tensions that constitutes the one church of Christ. The devotional, intellectual and institutional dimensions of church invariably support, challenge and complement one another. Each, if it becomes hegemonic, only diminishes the mystery of the church.

Finally, from the time of his initial

conversion to faith at age 15 to the end of his long life, Newman insisted upon the primacy of “the dogmatic principle” in the life of the church, not as proposition but as person. He writes, “It is the Incarnation of the Son of God rather than any doctrine drawn from a partial view of Scripture (however true and momentous it may be) which is the article of a standing or falling Church.” For Newman, as for Vatican II, of which he was a precursor and inspiration, this affirmation of Christ-centered faith and identity is the compelling condition for authentic Catholic inclusiveness.

Fifteen years ago, conscious of a growing and debilitating polarization in the church in the United States, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin inaugurated the Catholic Common Ground Initiative. The initiative’s founding document, “Called to Be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril,” trenchantly analyzed the pastoral situation and offered hopeful principles and guidelines for moving forward. Foremost among them was the following: “Jesus Christ, present in Scripture and sacrament, is central to all that we do; he must always be the measure and not what is measured.” Jesus Christ remains always the one foundation upon which theologians and bishops can securely stand. **A**

ON THE WEB

From 1991, David S. Toolan, S.J., reports on the C.T.S.A. americamagazine.org/pages

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The cast of "The Book of Mormon"



BOOKS & CULTURE

THEATER | ROB WEINERT-KENDT

LAUGHS AND GASPS

The many emotions of Broadway's new season

Pain is at the root of most humor, from the banana-peel slip to "Springtime for Hitler." And as a crop of new shows on Broadway proves, misery may love company, but its best friend is comedy. In "The Mother*** With the Hat," "The Book of Mormon" and "Good People," the depths of human despair are the wellsprings of laughter, albeit occasionally the sort of laughter that is nearly indistinguishable from gasping shock or disbelief. And in the extraordinary British import "War Horse," horror is transmuted not so much into comedy as into ripe, old-fashioned melodrama—trauma as entertainment value.

The season's runaway hit is, a little

improbably, the exuberantly profane **The Book of Mormon**. The show's pervasive crudeness is no surprise, given that two of its creators are Trey Parker and Matt Stone (who together created "South Park"). Nor is its high level of musical-theater craft unexpected, given that its third co-author is Robert Lopez, the co-composer/lyricist of "Avenue Q," and that its director/choreographer is the multitalented Casey Nicholaw of "Drowsy Chaperone" fame. What is startling about this poppy fable, in which two naïve Mormon missionaries ply their all-American religion in war- and disease-ravaged Uganda, is how sweetly sympathetic, even substantive, it turns out to be.

To be sure, the authors are clearly nonbelievers who chose the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a fat satirical target because, as a relatively young, awkward religion, Mormonism is still working out some kinks in real time (like the group's 1978 decision to reverse a ban on African-American priests). What better way to cast doubt-by-association on all religious authority and revelation?

But if "The Book of Mormon" offered only gleeful blasphemy toward a little-understood faith, it would be a poor excuse for a show, let alone a hit. Instead, the authors have done their homework and come up with a sincerely loving cartoon portrait of young Mormon missionaries as well-intentioned innocents, cast adrift like a small flotilla of *Candides* into a vicious, cynical world that rattles not only their particular faith but faith in

PHOTOS: JOAN MARCUS

any kind of divine providence.

The show's turning point comes when in a last-ditch attempt to make Joseph Smith's prophecies relate to the unspeakably bleak lives of his African audience, a nerdy missionary named Arnold (the irresistible Josh Gad) ad-libs a kind of pop-culture syncretism in which Brigham Young and his fellow church fathers fought off dysentery, AIDS and genital mutilation with the assistance not only of angels and frogs but of hobbits and Ewoks.

Since "The Book of Mormon" views religious faith as magical thinking that somehow (magically?) makes us kinder to each other, Arnold's "revision" is considered just as valid as Joseph Smith's prophecy—a glib gloss on theology, to put it mildly. But Parker, Stone and Lopez also understand that doubt is not faith's acid but its fuel. In one lightly mocking moment based on the annual pageant performed at Hill Cumorah, near Palmyra, N.Y., in July, a dying Joseph Smith realizes that while no one will be able to prove the truth of his golden plates, a nonempirical faith may be the point. As he sings to God: "They'll have to believe it just cuz/ Oh, I guess that's kind of what you're going for."

At first glance, faith would not



Tate Donovan and Frances McDormand in "Good People"

seem to be a driving impulse for the addicted and/or otherwise damaged characters in Stephen Adly Guirgis's gritty urban comedy **The Mother*** With the Hat**. Even the show's resident A.A. evangelizer, Ralph (played crisply by Chris Rock), barely mentions the program's well-known "higher power." In fact, as Ralph makes all too clear in the course of the play, get-

ting clean does not give him the moral high ground, nor would he even want to claim it. Ralph delivers this unwelcome news to his faltering 12-step sponsee, Jackie (the gentle giant Bobby Cannavale), whose most punishing addiction is not to any particular drug or drink but to the mercurial Veronica (a fierce, almost feral Elizabeth Rodriguez).

Jackie's mulish persistence in loving his longtime sweetheart—who in popular parlance is a "hot mess," with no connotation of that phrase exempted—drives him to violent, ultimately self-defeating extremes. That dogged faithfulness is also a clue to Guirgis's real project here: to get at the huge, unavoidable cost of believing, of loyalty, of conscience. To have a heart in this world is to have a heart broken. But does Jackie—or Guirgis, or any of us—want to live any other way? As he has shown before, Guirgis is better at evoking character and at grappling with profound themes in vivid, spiky contemporary language than at shaping an entirely satisfying play. "Hat" is no exception. But under Anna D.



Bobby Cannavale and Chris Rock in "The Mother*** With the Hat"

Shapiro's sharp direction, it is a tight little fist of a show with plenty of punch.

Virtue is also its own punishment in David Lindsay-Abaire's subtler, ulti-

mately more satisfying **Good People**. The title is a South Boston idiom that means essentially "all right," as in, "He's good people." But Lindsay-Abaire ("Rabbit Hole," "Fuddy Meers") fully

intends, and mostly achieves, a more encompassing inquiry into our native complacency. The play investigates the American assumption that, no matter the privileges that cordon off one class from another in our increasingly unequal economy, we all basically mean well: We are all in this together, and none of us are really bad persons, after all, are we?

This tale of an unemployed, stressed-out single mom from "Southie," Margaret (Frances McDormand), builds to a bravura face-off in the posh Chestnut Hill home of her old neighborhood flame, Mike (Tate Donovan), who left Southie far behind and is now a successful endocrinologist. Complicating this potentially schematic class conflict is Mike's younger, blue-blooded African-American wife Kate (Renee Elise Goldsberry), who is in every respect his social superior, not to mention Margaret's. This last socioeconomic wrinkle allays our fears that Lindsay-Abaire has stacked the deck entirely in favor of poor, working-class Margaret over wealthy, roots-forgotten Mike. Though Mike ultimately comes off as an entitled, hypocritical jerk, Kate's peppery clarity keeps throwing this easy moral equation off balance. The result is the season's most penetrating, not to mention disarmingly funny, play.

You will hear more tears than laughter at **War Horse**, the full-tilt epic extravaganza from London's National Theatre, now playing at Lincoln Center. And I do mean you will *hear* the tears. The sobbing in the theater is audible at this openly sentimental story of a boy and his beloved horse suffering the depredations of World War I. That the show has already been turned into a Spielberg movie (watch for it in December) makes perfect sense; with its stirring underscoring and shameless manipulation of children and animals in jeopardy, it already feels Spielbergian.

CALLING COLLECT

In college I phoned you in spurts from
campus pay phones like confessional booths.

Your phone number was my introductory prayer
memorized and dialed so rapidly that I had to

say it all at once to remember any one part of it.

On my way to the dining hall or having skipped

a class, you always picked up no matter
the time of day as if you were waiting

patiently behind the screen even though
you knew my face and voice, and always

seemed so pleased to hear it and listen on
as I spilled sins that probably didn't even

register on a Richter scale though I believed they
moved the world. Even if you were not

the one I needed forgiveness from, after half-assing
some paper or blowing off a friend, no absolution

ever came without you. I hung up, blessed and resolved
to be a bit stronger and to sin no more.

HEATHER ANGELL

HEATHER ANGELL is a campus minister at a Boston area high school and a graduate student at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry.

But there is one key difference between the play and the film, and it makes all the difference: The “horses” here are stirring, galloping, big-as-life contraptions from South Africa’s Handspring Puppet Company. In fact, the show’s most moving sections are not the story’s nail-biting near-deaths and weepy reunions but its pure moments of stage physics, in which our main horse hero, Joey, is harnessed first to a plow and later to a mud-bound cannon in the midst of battle. This unreal

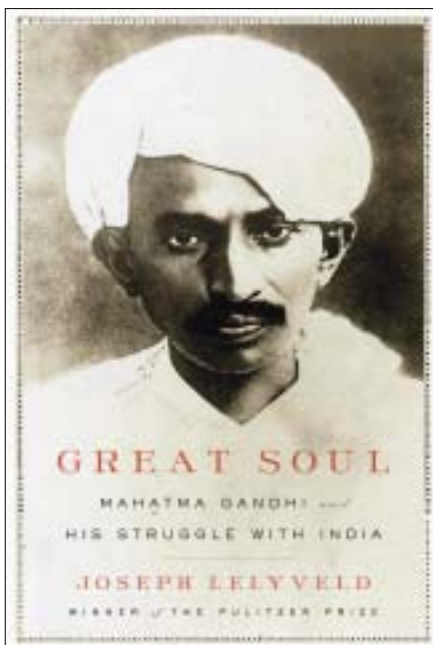
ON THE WEB

Charles K. Wilber reviews the HBO film “Too Big To Fail.” americamagazine.org/culture

horse seems to wheeze and heave under these man-made burdens, and we somehow feel that we are breathing and suffering along with him. Short of hauling us all in a cart behind him, Joey—and this extraordinary theatrical event—could not move us more.

ROB WEINERT-KENDT, an arts journalist and associate editor of *American Theater* magazine, has written for *The New York Times* and *Time Out New York*. He writes a blog called *The Wicked Stage*.

CHARLES J. BORGES DASHED HOPES



GREAT SOUL Mahatma Gandhi And His Struggle With India

By Joseph Lelyveld
Knopf. 448p \$28.95

Pulitzer prize-winner Joseph Lelyveld has written an insightful book on the “father of *ahimsa* or non-violence,” whose smiling face appears

on every Indian currency bill and whose name marks countless streets, universities, institutes and centers in the land of his birth. Called the Father of the Nation, or Bapuji, Mahatma Gandhi’s birth anniversary (Oct. 2) is a public holiday, when the country bows in a national show of praise and remembrance of the person who was largely responsible for India’s gaining independence from British rule on Aug. 15, 1947. Politicians and religious leaders remind the people (at least on this day) of the need to imbibe the values he taught and for which he died.

Born Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1869 in the state of Gujarat in western India, his various paths took him to study law in England, to a 20-year stay in South Africa and to a long and strenuous involvement in making India free until his death at the hands of a Hindu right-wing fanatic on Jan. 30, 1948.

Why does the world continue to remember and reflect on this unusual politician, social worker and visionary, who held on to truth as the ultimate

weapon in his armory? Why this fascination with someone who said that he had been trying all his life to identify himself with the most illiterate and downtrodden and who preferred the company of the Indian untouchables to that of the high and mighty?

Lelyveld’s book, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle With India*, is a splendid tribute to a man who continues to awe the world more than 60 years after his death. It is not about someone who dazzled the world with his brilliance or flamboyance but about a person who developed his homespun wisdom in support of freedom movements in South Africa and in India and lived it with its bitter consequences.

Lelyveld scores by devoting almost half his book to Gandhi’s stay in South Africa and by describing well how that long and varied visit formed the Gandhi of India. He mentions that as an author he traveled to South Africa merely looking for a story about Gandhi—and what a story he found. Gandhi had initially gone there himself as a young 23-year-old rookie lawyer to help in a legal dispute involving two Muslim families with roots in India and imagined returning in a year’s time. But that was not to be. His own experiences at the hands of racist whites while traveling in a train and his witnessing of other acts of discrimination suffered by the indentured Indian laborers there turned him into a fighter for their cause. Claiming that he had seen the world in its grim reality every moment, he sent regular missives to the South African newspapers, popularized for the first time passive resistance to government rule and cajoled his way, winning concessions for the workers, or “coolies,” as they were disparagingly called.

He owed a debt of spiritual gratitude to the Sermon on the Mount, to the writings of John Ruskin (“Unto This Last”) and to Leo Tolstoy setting up settlements (the Phoenix settle-

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ment outside Durban and the Tolstoy settlement outside Johannesburg), where residents took vows to lead austere lives of vegetarianism, sexual abstinence and prayerful self-reliance. His work partially complete, he returned to India to finish the task at home. He did not plunge headlong into it but took time traveling the length of the country to meet and see firsthand the lives and the misery of his fellow men and women. He advocated early on, as president of the Indian National Congress (the main political plank at the time), the idea of *swaraj*, or self-rule, which he believed was larger than mere political independence from English rule. Under it, he affirmed, the dumb would begin to speak, and the lame would begin to walk.

Lelyveld takes pains to describe Gandhi's insistence (while in South Africa) on dealing with the issues of untouchability, for the Mahatma insisted that as long as India allowed a

large section of her people to be treated as pariahs at home, so long would they be treated as pariahs abroad. Gandhi's African sojourn was not in vain. It provided him with a four-pillar program for addressing the Indian struggle: the unbreakable Hindu-Muslim alliance; the removal of the curse of untouchability; acceptance of nonviolence as a way of life; and the promotion of homespun yarn as a national industry. He saw very clearly in his dealings with Mohammed Jinnah, the leader of the Indian Muslim League, the need for the Hindu majority to make common cause with the Muslims. Hence his initial support for the Khilafat movement and the Indian Muslim struggle to preserve the authority of the Ottoman sultan.

Gandhi was most often a lone operator, and one never knew what he would do next. In March 1930, in a defiant show of strength, he walked 12 miles a day over a period of 24 days to

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Dandi (a coastal town in Gujarat on the west coast) to harvest salt and defy the British law against doing so. He joined hands with the National Congress in supporting the Quit India movement of 1942. Finally, when he could do nothing to avoid the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, he spent Independence Day far removed from Delhi in solidarity with Muslims who had been at the receiving end of Hindu fanaticism.

Lelyveld quotes the British economist Harold Laski: "No living man has, either by precept or example, influenced so vast a number of people in so direct and profound a way." How true. Though Gandhi dealt with royalty, heads of government and celebrities (Charlie Chaplin, George Bernard Shaw and Lord Mountbatten, the last British Viceroy in India, counted him as their friend) and lived with the poor and the untouchables, he finally felt that India had no longer any need of him. Broken in spirit that his social program had gone largely unfulfilled, he spent his last days in Delhi meeting well-wishers and attending communal evening prayers.

The author's crisp and lively style eases the reader through the various facets of the Mahatma's life and portrays movingly the eventual collapse and sadness of the man who worked passionately all his life for social and national causes. As the book's subtitle indicates, while Gandhi had to fight the British, his greater fight was with the deep and growing problems within India itself. Lelyveld's tribute to the Mahatma captures authoritatively and penetratingly the unbelievable life of a man about whom he writes "the original, with all his quirkiness, elusiveness and genius for reinvention, his occasional cruelty and deep humanity, will always be worth pursuing."

CHARLES J. BORGES, S.J., is an associate professor of history at Loyola College, Baltimore, Md.

KAREN SUE SMITH

A CENTURY IN PAINT

ALICE NEEL

The Art of Not Sitting Pretty

By Phoebe Hoban

St. Martin's Press. 512p \$35

Whatever fed Alice Neel's ferocious determination to become an artist cannot be explained by the facts of her long, hard and complex life. Those facts are full of ironies and contradictions. How did a woman prone to breakdowns in young adulthood weather decades of penury, family instability and artistic obscurity—plus abandonment by her spouse and episodes of violence by a longtime lover? In her new biography, *Alice Neel: The Art of Not Sitting Pretty*, Phoebe Hoban has

combined Neel's own writings with interviews of Neel's family, friends and artist colleagues to offer readers a convincing interpretation of Neel's interior life: what motivated her, confounded her and fed her tenacity. Hoban also shows how Neel's paintings (mostly portraits in oil, but also still lifes, landscapes and hundreds of works on paper) document and interpret not only the artist's life but also much of the century in which she lived.

Ultimately, the work of Alice Neel has vindicated her efforts and given her a towering place in the pantheon of American art. That place is still rising. In 2010, a portrait by Neel sold at Christie's for \$782,500. Neel's paintings appear in major museums, and her work has been exhibited every year since her death in 1984.

Alice Neel (1900-84), a pretty straw-

berry-blond girl from Colwyn, Pa., was 20-something and aching for excitement when she left home for art school in Philadelphia. At a summer art camp, she fell in love with Carlos Enríquez, the son of a wealthy Cuban physician. They married in 1925, days before Neel's graduation from the Philadelphia School of Design for Women. Enríquez and Neel both had artistic pretensions that in retrospect seem completely warranted. They made a brief splash on the Cuban art scene, where Neel had her first solo show. But neither talent nor ambition could make their marriage work. Enríquez had been raised in luxury with servants; Neel, who came of age during the height of the women's suffrage movement,

had no desire to wait on anyone. When she refused to live in Havana, the young couple moved to New York and nearly starved. Their first child, born in November 1926, died 10 months later from diphtheria. In grief, Neel created a set of watercolors, including the poignant "After the Death of a Child" and, later, "Futility of Effort."

Although Neel worked at a bank and Enríquez as a freelance illustrator, the couple was impoverished. When their second daughter, Isabetta, was born in 1928, Neel relied on public health care. Hoban describes Neel's painting "Well Baby Clinic," made after Isabetta's birth, as "one of the least sentimental depictions of new motherhood ever created."

A year later the stock market crashed. Enríquez left Neel in New York, took Isabetta to his sisters in



Havana and ran off to the art scene in Paris. What was supposed to be a monthlong venture turned tragic: Neel never joined her husband in France, nor did she fetch their daughter from Cuba, after her own mother said she could not help Neel care for the child. "I loved Isabetta, of course I did," Neel told a friend, "But I wanted to paint." This conflict between family and the unrelenting demands made on an artist is the central drama of Neel's life. Hoban treats it at length and in perspective. Few artists have succeeded at both commitments—almost none without a wife at home to manage the family.

Neel's response to this string of enormous losses was to paint—almost without sleeping or eating. Desperate and alone, she broke down, became suicidal and was sent to a sanitarium. Psychotherapy and painting restored her health, but it took a year. She and Enriquez never divorced, and twice he tried to reconcile with Neel, but she never lived with him or Isabetta again.

During the Great Depression, Neel, like thousands of other artists, was employed by the W.P.A. easel project, which paid her for one painting every two weeks. The income allowed

Neel to subsist among other artists in Greenwich Village. The Depression shaped Neel's early work. With Ben Shahn, Jack Levine and Reginald Marsh, Neel painted unsentimental depictions of the poor and working classes, forging a style known as Social Realism. Social Realism was popular from the early 1930s until 1948, when it was superseded by Abstract Expressionism.

Neel, a sensualist, had a succession of lovers, some of whom remained her lifelong friends. She was living with Kenneth Doolittle, a labor activist,

when Isabetta, 6, paid a brief visit. Neel painted a large nude portrait of her daughter as though, Hoban writes, "she were laying claim to the very essence of the girl." That same year Doolittle, a drug addict, in a jealous rage involving another man, slashed and burned 200 of Neel's watercolors and 60 oils (years of work), including "the Isabetta." Neel quickly painted a duplicate; the painting was so important to her.

Hoban—author of a critically acclaimed biography of the artist Jean-

Michel Basquiat—excels at her major task: integrating Neel's personal life with her professional life. She painted through 40 years of neglect by the art world and at age 60 found success.

In 1960 Neel appeared in a beat film, along with Larry Rivers and Allen Ginsberg. Then one of Neel's portraits of Frank O'Hara appeared in ARTnews, with a positive review of her work, which described its "haunting power." Meanwhile, Neel's subjects

changed—from friends and neighbors in Spanish Harlem, where she lived for decades, to artists and critics.

Her work was shown alongside that of Milton Avery, Philip Pearlstein, Fairfield Porter and George Segal. Neel met Andy Warhol and Henry Geldzahler, a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, both of whom she later painted. When her first solo show in a decade was a hit, her prices rose.

The counterculturalism of the '60s and the feminism of the '70s found resonance in Neel's life and work. She was a guest on "The Johnny Carson Show" and became a minor celebrity on the college circuit. The last chapters of Hoban's book read like an avalanche of reviews of Neel's exhibitions and new works.

Hoban credits Neel with significant artistic innovations. Neel transformed the nude by including pregnant women, children and herself at age 80; she reinvigorated the portrait, giving it a psychological dimension and broadening its subjects to include gay and transgendered people; and, with a social conscience, she painted multicultural subjects. Neel identified deeply with her subjects. "By doing that," she explained, "there's a kind of something I get that other artists don't get."

ON THE WEB

Karen Sue Smith
blogs about art
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WITHOUT GUILF



"I'm building an ark because the polar ice caps are melting."

KAREN SUE SMITH is editorial director of *America*.

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LETTERS

Count on Canon 212

Re the editorial “Paths of Conscience” (5/2): The scriptural arguments of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning the ordination of women have been expressed in two documents, *Inter Signiores* (1976) and a commentary that treats the arguments in an ecumenical context (1977). Roughly four out of five theologians who have published their evaluations of these documents have found them seriously flawed in both methodology and use of Scripture.

So they should be evaluated and revised by another credible group of international Catholic theologians. Conferences should be held offering persons the opportunity to present theological, scriptural and pastoral arguments on all sides.

They would not have to challenge the 1976 Vatican decision itself. They need only call for implementation of the Code of Canon Law (No. 212, par. 3), which gives the faithful, in accord with the knowledge they possess, the right and duty to manifest to their pastors and to the other Christian faithful their opinion on matters that pertain to the good of the church.

ARON MILAVEC
Cincinnati, Ohio

Bishops Speak Clearly

In your editorial “Let’s Be Clear on the Budget” (5/2), you note the importance of the current debate surrounding the federal budget and the deficit, and you write, “The bishops, along with other leaders and sectors of the

church, need to speak with clarity about the budget as a moral document.”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has been carrying out that task consistently and persistently. Last month, as the House of Representatives prepared to consider its budget for fiscal year 2012, Bishops Stephen Blaire and Howard Hubbard, chairmen of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development and the Committee on International Justice and Peace, respectively, wrote every member of the House of Representatives. They told the members, “the moral measure of this budget debate is not which party wins or which powerful interests prevail, but rather how those who are jobless, hungry, homeless or poor are treated.” The letter also made clear that shared sacrifice means all options are on the table, including military spending and raising revenue. The letter can be read on the conference’s Web site.

Additionally, the U.S.C.C.B. recently took the lead in an unprecedented effort to bring together diverse Christian leaders around a clear moral message: defend poor and vulnerable people in the budget process. This “Circle of Protection” initiative includes Bishop Blaire and Bishop Hubbard, Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Charities USA, as well as the National Association of Evangelicals, Bread for the World, the National Council of Churches and the Salvation Army, just to name a few.

JOHN L. CARR
Executive Director, Department of Justice,
Peace, and Human Development, U.S.C.C.B.
Washington, D.C.

Cold-Blooded Killing

The United States has offered no evidence whatsoever to show that Osama bin Laden made even the slightest movement to resist the Navy Seal attack. No matter what one thinks of the Al Qaeda leader, this was a cold-blooded U.S. plot, sanctioned by President Obama, to assassinate Bin Laden and secretly remove and bury his body.

In the classic film “Apocalypse Now,” the character Willard (Martin Sheen) is also given a military “mission to proceed up the Nung River in a Navy patrol boat. Pick up Colonel Kurtz’s path at Nu Mung Ba, follow it, learn what you can along the way. When you find the colonel, infiltrate his team and exterminate the colonel’s command...with extreme prejudice.”

While the U.S. government plays in “real time” with the facts on “Operation Bin Laden” the movie picks up on the real moral: Kurtz says to Willard, “and they call me an assassin. What do you call it when the assassins accuse the assassin? They lie. They lie and we have to be merciful...those nabobs.” In the end, violence begets only violence.

The death of Osama bin Laden should lead us to reflect on our own eventual death and on the moral responsibility we all have before God. Osama bin Laden was gravely responsible for sowing the seeds of division and promoting hatred and violence in the name of religion. But how often do we do the same—even to the extent of murdering our own flesh and blood through abortion—in the name of personal selfishness and greed?

PAUL KOSKOSKI
Hamilton, Ontario



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Stepping Out on the Word

ASCENSION (A), JUNE 5, 2011

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ps 47:2-9; Eph 1:17-23; Mt 28:16-20

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8)

In her book *Wouldn't Take Nothin' for My Journey Now*, the poet Maya Angelou recalls her grandmother, who raised her in the little town of Stamps, Ark. She describes her as “a tall cinnamon-colored woman with a deep, soft voice,” whose difficult life caused her to rely utterly on the power of God. Angelou envisioned Mamma “standing thousands of feet up in the air on nothing visible,” as she would draw herself up to her full 6 feet, clasp her hands behind her back, look up into a distant sky and declare, “I will step out on the word of God.” Angelou continues: “I could see her flung into space, moons at her feet and stars at her head, comets swirling around her. Naturally it wasn't difficult for me to have faith. I grew up knowing that the word of God has power.”

In today's readings, we have similar images of Jesus taken up into the sky, having spent an earthly lifetime stepping out on the word of God, indeed, enfleshing that divine Word. The disciples want to know if now is the time when he is going to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). They have hopes and expectations for the future fixed in past experiences of God's saving hand in their history. Jesus does not directly answer their question but points them to the power of the Holy Spirit, who will guide them to witness to his Gospel courageously in new sit-

uations beyond what they can possibly imagine. As Jesus himself learned in his earthly sojourn, the what of the mission cannot fully be known, but only the Who always with and within those who are willing to trust and to witness to the divine love.

In the Gospel, the turbulence experienced by the followers of Jesus in the time of transition after his death is reflected in the narrative. “The eleven” calls to mind the painful reality that “the Twelve” (10:5) are no more, as one of them betrayed Jesus and then ended his own life (Mt 27:5). Yet the thread of hope is sustained, as the story continues where Jesus' appearance to the women at the empty tomb left off. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had seen and worshiped Jesus, and had been commissioned by him to tell the other disciples to go to Galilee, where they would see him (28:9-10). Today's Gospel presumes that they have fulfilled this directive and the others have believed them, though nagging doubts persist (v. 17).

Another tension is evident in the reference to “eleven disciples.” Disciples comprised a group larger than the Twelve (referred to 73 times in Matthew), among whom were, most notably, the Galilean women who followed and ministered (27:55). While

Matthew has depicted the women as apostles who are commissioned in 28:7-10, he excludes them from the commission in today's Gospel to preach to all the nations. Already tensions regarding women's witness surface.

Difficult, too, was the shift to a mission that would extend beyond Israel. Until this point in the Gospel, Jesus had insisted that the disciples go only to the “lost sheep of the house



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Let Jesus lead you into the place where he is always with you.
- How are you being asked to step out on the word of God?
- How does the Spirit's power propel you into unknown territory?

ART: TAD DUNNE

of Israel” (10:5; see also 15:24). Now the directive is to go to “all nations.” The troubles stirred up by this new mission were myriad. The question of how law-observant Jewish Christians would be able to eat with gentiles was only the tip of the iceberg. To weather such turbulent transitions, both in those early days of the church and now, the one surety is that Jesus is always with us (28:20 echoes 1:23), as we step out on the word of God in trust.

BARBARA E. REID

BARBARA E. REID, O.P., a member of the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, Mich., is a professor of New Testament studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Ill., where she is vice president and academic dean.

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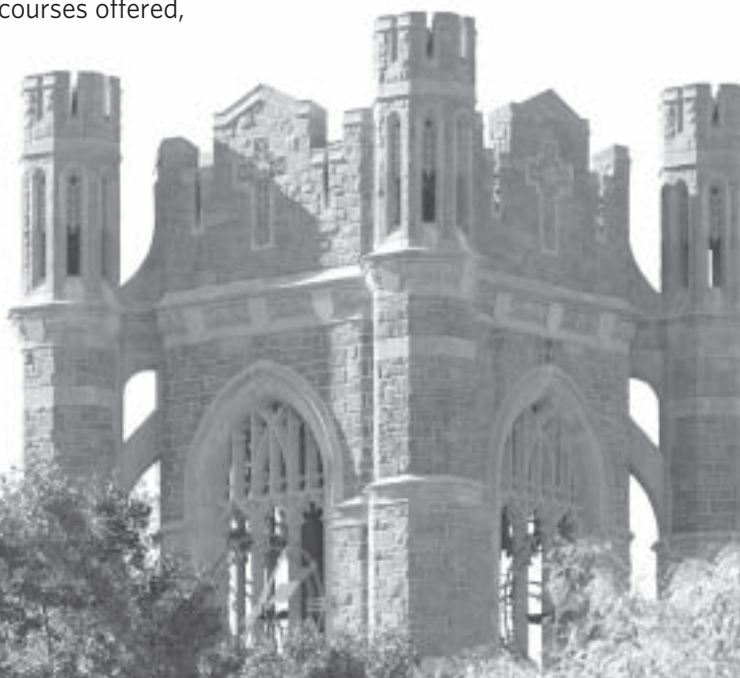
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