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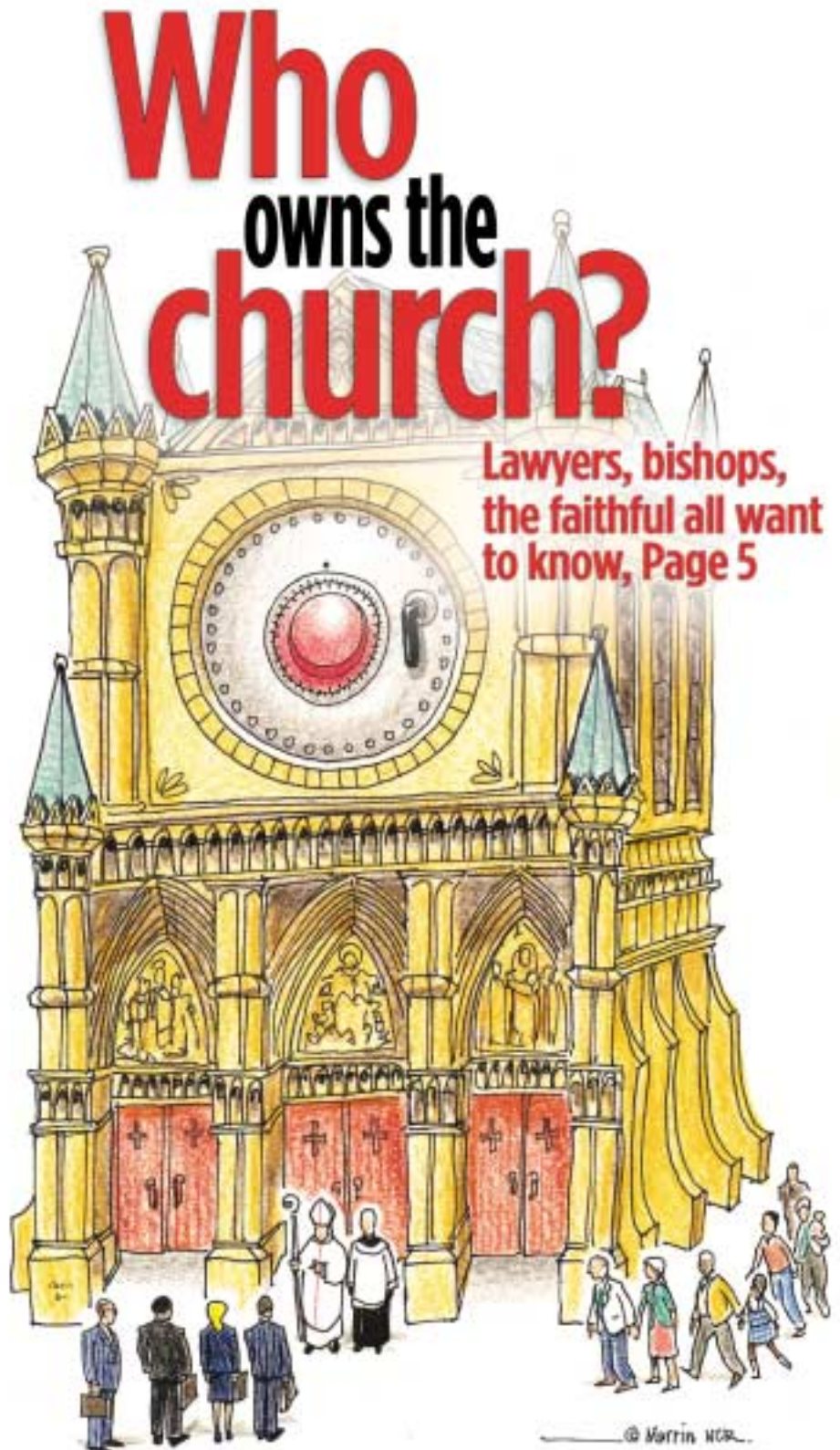
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EDITOR'S NOTE

'A grace-filled opportunity'



The day before we went to press, as the images from New Orleans and Mississippi began to overwhelm any attempt to understand the tragedy, I received a call from Mary Jaeger, who had both a question and an idea.

How would one go about finding someone with the authority to match up Catholic parishes around the country with those in areas hardest hit by Hurricane Katrina? She had called the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as well as Catholic Charities USA, but couldn't get an answer. It's understandable, since those agencies aren't set up to do that sort of thing. Nor could I give any ready answer, but I thought the idea intriguing enough to pass it along to see what ideas you might have. I suspect achieving something will have more to do with a creative approach by ordinary parishioners than any single authority.

Jaeger has in mind the kind of relationship that some parishes have with counterparts in, say, Latin America, where there is an exchange of people as well as goods. In fact, she is not so much interested in immediate aid as she is in the long-term connection with other Catholics who could be struggling with the effects of Katrina for months or more after the initial swell of aid arrives.

The idea has much more to do with solidarity and what she calls "a great, grace-filled opportunity" to do what we should be about than with undertaking a relief effort.

Jaeger is retired but still works part time as a social worker for Catholic Charities in the Rockford, Ill., diocese. She said she is pursuing the idea because she has "a real pain in my heart" for the people whose homes have been destroyed and whose lives have been disrupted. She wants to hear from people in those places, to know what they think about their long-term needs, and she envisions the kind of parish-to-parish relationship where parishes could contribute beyond emer-

gency needs — perhaps people and skills that are needed in the months ahead.

E-mail your responses to me at troberts@ncr.org. What do you think? Can it be done? How?



Because of the effect of Katrina, the Postal Service announced that it is not accepting mail of any kind for delivery to zip codes beginning with 369, 393, 394, 395, 396, 700 and 701. Circulation manager Jo Ann Schierhoff said *NCR* will extend the subscriptions of customers in those areas the number of issues missed. Subscribers, of course, can gain access to the full content of *NCR* on our Web site, www.ncronline.org.



The combination of the Aug. 26 cover story on the situation in Boston and this week's cover story on the state of the question, "Who owns the church?" gives evidence, I think, of some of the forces in play that will eventually lead to structural change in the church.

All of these developments, which cause unprecedented turmoil and uncertainty, stem, of course, from the handling of the sex abuse crisis. That crisis long ago became a symptom of other, deeper ills. I think it is not too great a leap to claim that we are witnessing, through such events as the activities of the resolute faithful in Boston and the resort to bankruptcy proceedings in other dioceses, both the gradual disassembly and reconstruction of presumptions about authority, the place of the laity and the meaning of community within the Catholic fold. I don't know where, when or how it ends, but I can't imagine that the shape of the church will be the same when it's over. I also believe that laity eventually will be required to take far more responsibility for the functioning of the church (current hierarchical trends notwithstanding) than ever before.

Tom Roberts

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The Writer's Desk

Sept. 12
 Dennis Coday, *NCR* staff writer, reports on a parish meeting for eucharistic ministers to learn about changes to comply with the General Instruction on the Roman Missal.

Global Perspective

Sept. 13
 Gemma Tulud Cruz writes about political crisis in the Philippines. She asks: Is there something in the national psyche that perpetuates a cycle of elections followed by allegations of vote-rigging and corruption and the calls for presidential impeachment?

From Where I Stand

Every Thursday
 Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister offers her always-fresh opinions, ideas and reflections on the issues of our day, each week at NCRonline.org.

U.S. BRIEFS

Air Force issues guidelines

WASHINGTON — The Air Force has released new interim guidelines urging its military members and civilian employees to protect the free exercise of religion. The guidelines, issued Aug. 29, were called for in a June report that investigated the religious climate at the Air Force Academy, but an Air Force spokeswoman said they affect the entire military force.

The academy has had complaints about intimidating evangelical Christian practices at the school. The rules direct commanders and other leaders to avoid actions and language that might lead to the impression that they are officially endorsing or disapproving of a religion.

The rules discourage public prayer "in official settings," such as staff meetings, classes, sports events or practices, but permit "a brief nonsectarian prayer" during special, "non-routine" ceremonies, such as changes of command.

Musharraf to address Jews

NEW YORK — Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf is to address an invitation-only crowd of American Jewish leaders in New York City. Between 250 and 300 leaders representing national Jewish organizations, rabbinical schools and the major streams of Judaism are expected to attend the Sept. 17 event hosted by the Council for World Jewry.

Musharraf will be in New York to attend the 2005 World Summit at the United Nations.

Jack Rosen, chairman of the Council for World Jewry, cited Musharraf's philosophy of "enlightened moderation" as "exactly the kinds of words we are all searching for from leaders of the Muslim world."

Musharraf has described enlightened moderation as a two-pronged strategy. "The first part is for the Muslim world to shun militancy and extremism and adopt the path of socioeconomic uplift.

"The second is for the West, and the United States in particular, to seek to resolve all political disputes with justice and to aid in the socioeconomic betterment of the deprived Muslim world."

Seattle abuse case settled

SEATTLE — The Seattle archdiocese and St. Benedict's Abbey in Atchison, Kan., have jointly reached a \$2.6 mil-



Hurricane damage

—CNS/Reuters/U.S. Coast Guard
Flooded roadways are seen as the U.S. Coast Guard conducts initial damage assessment over New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, which struck Gulf states Aug. 29. The U.S. bishops' conference has called on all 195 Catholic dioceses in the United States to participate in a national collection to assist area residents. "The media coverage has made it abundantly clear that the needs will be great and long-lasting," said conference president Bishop William S. Skylstad. He added, "Catholic Charities will be among the primary responders." Skylstad said each diocese's "collections or gifts should be sent as soon as possible" to Catholic Charities USA, based in Alexandria, Va.

lion settlement of sexual abuse claims by seven victims of the late Benedictine Fr. John Forrester. The abuse is alleged to have occurred in the 1970s when Forrester was serving at Holy Rosary Parish in Seattle and All Saints Parish in Puyallup, Wash.

An archdiocesan news release said that the Benedictines will pay \$1 million and the remaining \$1.6 million will be paid by archdiocesan insurance programs.

The archdiocese has now settled nearly 200 sexual abuse claims for almost \$20 million since the 1980s. It still faces a number of sexual abuse claims, but no other pending claims involving Forrester.

Local churches determine policy

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — A special panel has urged the Presbyterians

Continued on Page 4

QUOTABLE
& NOTABLE

"I just don't want to die in this shirt."

—Tourist Tina Steven, wearing a Bourbon Street T-shirt with a lewd message, who decided to ride out Hurricane Katrina in a French Quarter hotel. The Associated Press reported Steven, a nursing assistant, and her paramedic husband Bryan survived the storm and had volunteered with local authorities.

"No matter what religion you are, whether you're a Catholic, whether you're voodoo ... we all pray. We all pray."

—Gail Henke, a New Orleans tour booker who made it through Katrina. "I am not a religious fanatic, but God has saved us," she said.

"Faith is not merely the attachment to a complex of dogmas, complete in itself; that is supposed to satisfy the thirst for God, present in the human heart."

—Pope Benedict XVI at his Aug. 28 Angelus talk. "Looking for Christ must be a constant yearning of believers," he said.

"We're just average American boys doing average American activities. But after Sept. 11, we also have to be ambassadors of our faith."

—Rehman Muhammad, 13, member of all-Muslim Boy Scout Troop 797 in Houston

"More people than ever are believing in life after death."

—Psychic James Van Praagh, discussing the fall TV season, which is heavy with programs about ghosts and paranormal phenomena

Firms profit by editing the dirty bits out of movies

Responding to the public outcry over sex and violence in contemporary movies, a number of companies have found a new niche — cleaning up the content of offensive films.

Some firms are marketing filtering devices and others, more controversially, are editing scenes and then reselling the film.

Under the Family Movie Act, which President Bush signed into law in April, unauthorized editing of Hollywood movies is legal.

Critics, however, are challenging the law in court, contending the editing amounts to theft.

But neither the challenge to the law

nor the other critics are inhibiting the champions of cleaned-up films.

"I like being able to watch movies in my home without having that wince factor when something comes up," said Bill Aho, chief executive officer of ClearPlay, a firm that manufactures censoring devices. "Nobody's comfortable seeing that little shot of nudity in the movies, not the kids, not Mom, not Dad."

Aho's firm makes a filtering device that allows viewers to customize movies and delete what they find offensive. He says it is being marketed in all 50 states.

More controversial is CleanFlicks, a

company that physically edits the movies and then sells or rents the edited versions along with the originals. "It's about providing the consumer with a choice in entertainment," says founder Ray Lines.

Lines has seven daughters and he said he wanted them to see movies like "Jerry Maguire," "Braveheart" and "Saving Private Ryan." He said the "F-word" appeared 125 times in the popular but R-rated movie "Good Will Hunting."

These "are great movies that have great messages, you know, that people should see," he said. "But I didn't want them [his daughters] to have to watch

the sex and the nudity and the gory violence and listen to the swear words."

According to Lines, romantic comedies are the most difficult to edit while action movies are the easiest.

His company even edits family films like the popular "Shrek."

Many people, Lines said, are surprised to learn there are violent scenes and swear words in films like "Shrek."

"That's one of the frustrating things," he said. "Hollywood will make kids' movies but there's profanity in it, there's swear words, there's crude humor. ... So these are things that parents ask us to take out for them."

—Religion & Ethics Newsweekly

4 IN THE BEGINNING

Continued from Page 3

Church (USA) to maintain its ban on noncelibate gay clergy, but the panel also wants local congregations to determine when to apply — or bypass — that standard.

The 20-member panel, which has spent four years studying divisions over homosexuality, said the church should retain its 1997 standards that call for church officers to maintain "fidelity ... in marriage" or "chastity in singleness."

At the same time, the Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church said local churches "have the duty to apply standards and the right to discern which are essential for ordained service."

Such exceptions on when "departures can be tolerated" would be made on a "case-by-case" basis, but could also be challenged in church courts. The proposals now head to the church's 2006 General Assembly in Birmingham, Ala.

WORLD BRIEFS

Bishop resigns amid allegations

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — An Argentine bishop's sudden resignation last month was accepted by the Vatican amid news reports that a 23-year-old male videotaped them having sexual relations. A church spokesman said the bishop may have been targeted by local politicians seeking revenge for his work against corruption.

News reports about Bishop Juan Maccaroni of Santiago del Estero said

he resigned after Vatican officials received the videotape. But Fr. Guillermo Macro, spokesman for the Buenos Aires archdiocese, said the situation looked like a setup by political enemies of Maccaroni, known for his criticisms of local and national politicians on social justice and corruption issues.

Macro praised the bishop in an Aug. 23 radio interview: "Nobody could object to his pastoral work. He was committed to the people in a province with a very corrupt government."

"Everything speaks of political vengeance. Everything rings like it was organized by an intelligence organization," Macro said.

Two-child policy opposed

NEW DELHI — Voicing displeasure over a bill introduced in parliament that would limit candidates running for parliament or state legislatures to two children, the chief ministers of Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh states in central India have said they would not enforce such a policy.

Six Indian states have laws mandating a two-child norm for members of village councils. Several Indian states have laws that bar families with more than two children from receiving housing loans, holding government jobs or gaining admission to public schools.

The tide may be turning against such tactics to curb population growth, however. In July while chairing a meeting of the National Commission on Population in New Delhi, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that coercion of any

kind to achieve population stabilization was unacceptable in a free society. Such policies have marginal impact and sometimes even cause resentment and nonacceptance, Singh told the meeting. India, with a population of 1.08 billion, has a birth rate of 1.65 percent, according to the United Nations.

Price cut for HIV/AIDS drugs

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — A deal hammered out by Latin American health ministers and the pharmaceutical industry last month lowers the cost of antiretroviral drugs in the region and should greatly increase the number of Latin Americans who can receive treatment for HIV/AIDS.

Negotiations between 26 laboratories and health ministers from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela resulted in price reductions of between 15 percent and 66 percent, depending on the product. The changes will greatly reduce the cost of providing treatment regimens to the 1.5 million people in Latin America living with HIV. For example, health officials estimate that treatment costs will be cut by 45 percent in Bolivia and 66 percent in Paraguay.

"The industry undertook price cuts and exclusive prices, which will allow us to reach universal access to treatment in Latin America by the end of the year," declared Jorge Bermúdez, an official with the Pan American Health Organization.

PEOPLE

The Beslan Mothers Committee finally secured an invitation to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin Sept. 2, the first anniversary of the massacre in School No. 1 that left 330 people dead, more than half of them children. The group called the invitation "a dirty political step," because it forced them to choose between being at home on the anniversary or being with Putin in Moscow for official commemorations of the seizure of the school by Chechen insurgents and the subsequent raid by Russian soldiers. Relatives of the victims blame the government for the carnage since it acted with the sole purpose of "killing Chechen terrorists and not saving the children." The mothers' group accepted the invitation.

Fourth grade teacher Lisa Elliott — described by colleagues at Holy Cross School in Portland, Ore., as gentle, earnest and caring — became a U.S. women's powerlifting record holder in August. She hoisted 371 pounds in the dead-lift event during a meet held in Portland. "I don't usually tell people about" the hobby, she said. "But the kids usually get to know and then they say, 'Whoa! You could lift our dens.'"



—CNS

Msgr. Kevin W. Irwin, a professor of liturgy and sacramental theology, has been named dean of the school of theology and religious studies at The Catholic University of America.

John Rapp has been the unofficial rosary repairman for five Rochester, N.Y., parishes since 2002. Now he's looking to train more. "This is not a hobby; it's a commitment," Rapp said. Rosary repairmen take "on the job of repairing all the broken rosaries of their parish, not this week and next week, but on and on and on," he said. Catholics cherish their rosaries, because many are gifts from loved ones or handed down from previous generations, Rapp said.

Habitat for Humanity International, the global house-building ministry, has named Jonathan T.M. Reckford, a Presbyterian pastor from Minnesota, as its new chief executive officer. Reckford also has experience as an executive with electronics retailers Best Buy and Circuit City.

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STARTING POINT

By JOSEPH NASSAL

My freshman year at the high school seminary, we had to take swimming lessons. The lessons were part of the school's physical education requirement but also for safety's sake. With an indoor pool on the premises, it was important that all seminarians knew how to swim.

I went to a few of the classes but cut many of them. While I'm sure my absences were noted — there were 25 seminarians in my freshman class — I don't recall being challenged or disciplined for cutting class. Eventually, I did learn how to swim. I'm not a great swimmer but good enough to

stay afloat and keep from drowning. More than swimming, I learned how to tread water. I've been treading water ever since.

I'm not sure why I cut swimming classes my freshman year. Perhaps it was the memory of a near-drowning experience on a family vacation when I was 3 or 4 years old. As a result of that trip, I had to wake up early on cold Saturday mornings to go to an outdoor pool for swimming lessons.

Or maybe I was afraid of drowning. So instead of learning how to swim and overcome my fear, I cut class.

Though the system was changing, when I was in the seminary there was still a sense that some preferred their

priests to walk on water. Maybe subconsciously I was buying into that system and thought I didn't need to learn to swim.

I have been ordained 23 years, and I am still treading water.

I learned early in ministry that people are not looking for priests to walk on water but to walk with them. This has been a saving grace — the grace that has kept me from drowning in my mistakes, missteps and missed opportunities.

[Precious Blood Fr. Joseph Nassal is a retreat director and the author of eight books.]

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Diocesan bankruptcies raise church ownership issues

Control of parish assets up for debate in courts and parish closings

By JOE FEUERHERD

The decision of three U.S. dioceses to seek protection from creditors through the federal bankruptcy courts was always a gamble. One has already lost the gamble in a first round in court, one has sidestepped the issue, and the third awaits its fate. At the heart of these proceedings is the question appearing with increasing frequency as dioceses face financial crises: Who owns the church?

Facing hundreds of millions of dollars in potential awards to victims of clergy sexual abuse, the bishops of Tucson, Ariz., Spokane, Wash., and Portland, Ore., were convinced over the past year that Chapter 11 provided the best means to put their dioceses on sound financial footing. Critics say the dioceses hoped to avoid the scrutiny of civil trials. The bishops contend that the relatively orderly bankruptcy process affords the best measure of justice to both abuse victims and innocent parishioners.

Everyone agrees, however, that key to the success of the high stakes strategy was the hope that no court would make all diocesan holdings — churches and parish halls, schools and cemeteries, social service centers and retreat houses — part of the pot of available assets that could be sold to pay off creditors. Church lawyers argue that diocesan assets do not extend beyond the central administrative office of the diocese, the chancery. The idea, said Marcie Hamilton, an attorney advising abuse victim claimants, is “to reduce the size of the bankrupt estate so that much less money” is available to creditors.

The Tucson diocese, which filed for bankruptcy a year ago, won its bet. It avoided the question of ownership in a \$22.2 million agreement reached earlier this summer with sex abuse victims.

Next month, a bankruptcy court will hear arguments in which the Portland archdiocese seeks to limit the reach of creditors. In announcing the bankruptcy filing in July 2004, Portland Archbishop John Vlazny said, “Under canon law, parish assets belong to the parish. I have no authority to seize parish property.” Whether civil law will require him to do just that will be decided by a federal bankruptcy court.

According to Nicholas Cafardi, a canon and civil lawyer who advises both the dioceses of Portland and Spokane, Oregon state law is less favorable to dioceses citing canon law as a basis to restrict claims than the statutes in Washington state. If

Cafardi’s analysis is correct, things do not look good for Portland.

On Aug. 26, bankruptcy judge Patricia Williams dismissed the Spokane diocese’s claims that the bishop there, William Skylstad, had no control over parish assets.

Spokane’s lawyers, like those in Portland, argued that the bishop holds “bare legal title” to the property and assets that lawfully belong to the diocese’s 81 parishes and affiliated entities, such as schools and cemeteries.

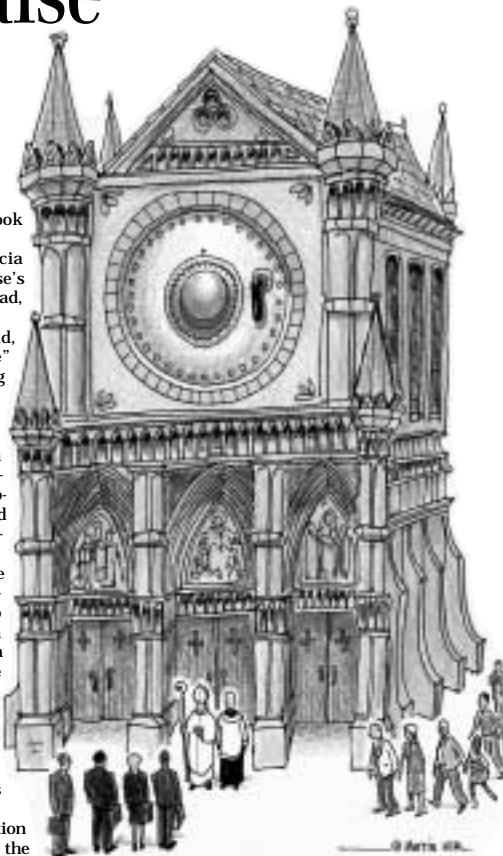
Further, like Vlazny in Portland, Spokane’s lawyers contended that canon law places parish holdings beyond the reach of the bishop. In addition, contended the diocese’s attorneys, to subject canon law to civil judicial scrutiny violated constitutional protections related to “free exercise” of religion.

Spokane’s creditors claimed exactly the opposite — that under civil law and by longstanding practice the bishop was the de facto “owner” of most everything within diocesan borders that bore the label “Catholic.” As a “corporation sole” under Washington law (see accompanying story), the creditors argued, Skylstad has absolute discretion over every asset held by the church. And by voluntarily entering into bankruptcy proceedings, they continued, he put those assets in play.

In a summary judgment, Judge Williams agreed with the creditors.

“It is not a burden on a religious organization which voluntarily seeks the protection of the bankruptcy laws to require it to treat its creditors in the same manner as any other debtor,” wrote Williams. The diocese’s argument, wrote Williams, “is in essence a request to impose internal ecclesiastical rules upon third parties who deal with the debtor in secular transactions.” Treating the diocese like any other debtor, concluded Williams, “does not interfere with the free exercise of religion.”

In her ruling, Williams cited two previous disputes, one involving a group of parishioners who sought to prevent the demolition of a Catholic school, the other a lawsuit filed by a person injured on parish property. In both cases the Spokane diocese explicitly named Skylstad as “owner” of parish properties. The diocese, implied Williams, was trying to have it both ways — claiming control and ownership when that position suited its interests, disinterested beneficence when



the situation called for another approach.

“A litigant cannot posit a legal or factual position and convince a court of the correctness of that position and then in a later case posit the contrary legal position even though the latter case involves a different opponent,” declared Williams.

A party, wrote Williams, “cannot argue out of both sides of its mouth.” If that was what was happening in Spokane regarding church property, it merely reflected the competing arguments over who owns the church that are taking place throughout the country.

As Williams was considering the Spokane case, Boston Archbishop Sean O’Malley received a communication from the Vatican’s Congregation for the

Continued on Page 6

From trusteeship to centralization — and back?

Diocesan bankruptcies resulting from generations of mismanagement of clergy sex abusers puts the issue in a new light, but the question of who owns the church in the United States has been around for nearly as long as there has been a U.S. church.

In the early 19th century, American congregations, both the majority Protestant denominations and Catholic parishes, were organized under trusteeships recognized by the state. Typically, the parish trustees handled all the administrative tasks associated with running a parish, including, in some cases, the hiring and firing of clergy. Though not specifically anti-Catholic, this decentralized system assuaged Protestant concerns of a growing church taking orders from a bishop or pope and flexing political muscle.

The system didn’t last.

“As the church began to grow in the first part of the 19th century, the rights of trustees were a constant sore point with bishops, the more so since trustees did not hesitate to appeal their grievances directly to Rome,” writes historian Charles Morris in *American Catholic*.

Led by New York Archbishop John Hughes (1850-64), the American hierarchy moved to quash the trusteeship system. Today, dioceses are typically established as “corporate aggregates,” with separate nonprofit corporations (typically headed by the bishop) established for different diocesan enterprises, such as parishes, schools and hospitals.

In more than half of U.S. dioceses (including Portland, Ore., and Spokane, Wash.), the dioceses are headed by a “corporation sole,” a bishop who by virtue

of his office is the legal owner of church property.

“History confirms that the general purpose of such statutes was to provide a device by which a religious organization could hold and acquire property as a separate perpetual legal entity,” bankruptcy judge Patricia Williams found in the Aug. 26 Spokane decision.

Given the centuries-old desire of the U.S. hierarchy to centralize control over parish property, the case made by the bishops of Spokane and Portland — that they have no control over the assets of parishes and other church-affiliated enterprises — does raise some eyebrows. “I could see where someone would be skeptical of that argument from a historical point of view,” said University of Notre Dame historian John McGreevy, author of *Catholicism and American Freedom*. As to

the Boston archdiocese’s initial claim that it controlled the assets of suppressed parishes, McGreevy said, “Whatever one thinks of the policy it seems more consistent with Catholic” practice in the United States than the hands-off approach described by Portland and Spokane.

Finally, what goes around may come around.

Given the bankruptcy court’s ruling in Spokane, Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese asks, “At what point will a committee of lay people decide that they are going to set up a separate corporation and call upon parishioners, and wealthy donors, to send their checks to it rather than drop them in the basket where they might end up in bankruptcy court?”

Trusteeship, anyone?

—Joe Feuerherd

Continued from Page 5

Clergy. Fifteen Boston parishes slated for "suppression" as part of a massive "reconfiguration" process had appealed their closures to the Vatican (NCR, Aug. 26).

Follow the money

Under the parish merger plan, O'Malley asserted the archdiocese's right to take the assets of the suppressed parishes and deposit them in archdiocesan accounts. The idea, according to archdiocesan officials, was to avoid saddling a poor parish merging with another poor parish with the liabilities of the closed parish, while not providing a financial boon in the case of the consolidation of two wealthy parishes. By mid-August, according to a diocesan report, nearly \$1 million from the accounts of closed parishes had been transferred to the diocese.

In seven of the parish closings, the Vatican congregation told O'Malley, the archdiocese had wrongly seized parish assets, which, under canon law, should follow the parishioners to their new parish.

The archdiocese is working with pastors to resolve the problem. "I think there's an understanding on the part of the pastors and the people of what the diocese is trying to achieve. I think the expectation of everyone in the diocese is, if the closing of a parish is going to be upheld, that the assets will be used for the overall good of the church," O'Malley told *The Boston Globe*.

Ironies abound. In Spokane the court ruled "that the corporation sole could sell any parish out from under parishioners and give the money to the diocese," noted Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese, author of *Archbishop: Inside the Power Structure of the American Catholic Church*. The conclusion? "American civil law gives more power to a bishop than the Vatican does when it comes to finances."

Boston is not the only diocese confused about who owns what.

In Austin, Texas, as part of an \$80 million publicly supported bond issue to finance church construction pro-

American civil law gives more power to a bishop than the Vatican does when it comes to finances.'

—Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese

jects, the diocese stated that Bishop Gregory Aymond "is the legal owner of all real property of the church, including real property in the parishes, within the geographical boundaries of the diocese. ... This includes parish churches and other parish facilities." However, notes the document supporting the bond issue, "there can ... be no assurance that the exercise of episcopal power over assets held in the name of one or more parishes will not be challenged under civil law or canon law by a parish, pastor or a parishioner, creditor, court or others."

Meanwhile, in the Nashville, Tenn., diocese, church officials were ordered earlier this summer to disclose parish and Catholic school assets as part of a \$68 million suit brought by two clergy sex abuse victims. The diocese maintains that it does not control the parishes and schools. In the five-and-a-half years since the suits were first filed, the diocese has transferred ownership over nine properties previously in the bishop's name to parishes and schools. Abuse victim advocates say the move is designed to shield church assets. The sex abuse trial is scheduled for March 2006.

The Spokane precedent

The question of ownership of church assets "will be a longer lasting issue in the U.S. than the abuse scandal," said Charles Zech, a Villanova University professor who studies church finance issues. "It can't go well either way for the church."

If courts hold that, in effect, parishioners own their parishes, then that "throws things out of whack" in terms of traditional church governance, said Zech. If they find, as the Spokane court did, that the bishop "owns" diocesan assets "then you'll see the dollar amounts [related to creditor or litigant claims] explode."

The Spokane decision "is a disaster



—CNS/Mike Penney

Bishop William S. Skylstad

for the church," said Sam Gerdano, executive director of the American Bankruptcy Institute. "The settlement dollars just went up dramatically," Gerdano said soon after the decision was announced, "and the claimants hold all the cards."

"The big issue," said canon lawyer Cafardi, formerly chair of the National Review Board established by the U.S. bishops to investigate the clergy sex abuse crisis, "is to what extent can we persuade civil courts to respect the internal ecclesiastical discipline of the

Catholic church?" Said Cafardi, "Without the ability to handle your property you can't really operate a church very effectively."

Spokane's Skylstad, meanwhile, has ordered the diocese's lawyers to appeal the decision. "The court's decision has national consequences," Skylstad said in a statement released the day of the ruling. "Its impact will be felt, not just by Catholic communities, but by many other church communities, of any denomination, of any faith expression. The decision influences the relationship between various church communities within a denomination, and church communities as they relate to civil authority."

The appeal will be heard first by a federal district court, then, if circumstances warrant, by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. (Of which Gerdano said, "If it's possible to find a more hostile forum for the Catholic church I can't imagine what it is.") The case could ultimately go to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The church, said Gerdano, "hasn't been consistent and they haven't been diligent about observing corporate formalities." Further, given the risks, the decision to seek bankruptcy protection was "fundamentally misguided."

"Catholic churches have no business putting themselves voluntarily under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court," said Gerdano. "They did this to themselves."

[Joe Feuerherd is NCR Washington correspondent. His e-mail address is jfeuerherd@natcath.org.]

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—Psalm 90:12



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The Roman imposition

Arthur Jones on his years as *NCR* editor, and the dawn of the Wojtyla-Ratzinger continuum

By ARTHUR JONES

I'll spare you the glossy New York magazine and British newspaper international correspondent years — except that, departing *Forbes* magazine as European bureau chief, I interviewed Michele Sindona, the Sicilian financier who took the Vatican Bank and its head, Archbishop Paul Marcinkus, to the cleaners. In January 1975, as the new *NCR* editor, I asked Marcinkus for an interview. He said no. My response: I've just bought the North American rights to the *London Sunday Times* exposé of Michele Sindona and the Vatican Bank, so he could please himself. Marcinkus changed his mind, I flew to Rome. Some Catholic hierarchs understand hardball because they play such a lot of it.

The *NCR* board knew I was in as editor for a minimum of three years, a maximum of 10. In an already divided church I wanted to show there was a single thing called "church," up against state-as-state, fighting for the rights of the poor without losing for a moment its sacramental role — its strength and its salvation.

Why? The intellectual underpinnings of Vatican II (1962-65) had a strong economic component. This was the first council of Leo XIII's Catholic social justice teaching church, one that sided with the workers and the poor as Europe's Industrial Revolution crested. It was a council of bishops who had lived through two world wars and — in Europe — 20 years of economic depression between. They knew the poor firsthand. The increasing First World affluence was obvious, but those bishops knew the rest of the world was only barely entering into, economically, what the United States and Europe were emerging from. The poor needed a church attuned to them. A church that was Jesus' yoke, actively easing the poor's burdens. The Vatican II bishops said amen to that.

NCR, born in 1964, wrote the first draft of that history. In 1975 I cranked up the coverage. American journalism at its best is fine indeed. Its basis is bold and enterprising reporting: Watch out for the underdog, combat abuse of power, place oneself at risk. It's a craft that makes few friends, brings no fame and no fortune.

NCR developed reporters who could take on the world — and, where necessary, the institutional church — and did so with bureaus in Washington, San Francisco and Rome, and stringers and freelancers in the major U.S. regions. And lots of women columnists.

By the late 1970s, *NCR*'s first draft was capturing Oscar Romero's historical role (June Carolyn Erlick) and was providing history's first reading (Penny Lernoux) on death and turmoil in Central and South America, including exposing the Catholic fascist right and the U.S. government's malignant roles in much of that hemisphere. In Poland, Peter Hebblethwaite drafted a history that showed, in the Catholic church versus Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, a different breed of courageous Catholics. (Later I sent Hebblethwaite to Rome.) Here at home, it was women's issues, a revitalized liturgy and a church moving shoulder to shoulder with the poor as it explored what Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in

the Modern World" actually required from Catholics.

The new pontificate? Karol Wojtyla widened the growing post-Vatican II internal Roman Catholic divide. It was obvious he would. In England as a young man, I'd gone to church with the families of émigré Polish intellectuals who had fled Hitler in the 1930s. They were locked in their moment. John Paul II responded to type. Resignedly, for I knew that Catholic mindset, when Wojtyla was elected I wrote in *NCR* that he would be tough on priests who wanted to leave and on married couples who wanted to divorce. I had other items on my list, but because he was a new man on the throne and might grow in office, I didn't run them. Uncharacteristic prudence on my part.

I was editor when Pope John Paul II made his first U.S. visit. With all bases covered, I told one photographer — he was Jewish, I believe — where he'd be in the best position to get the up-close facial I needed of the pope.

The photog called in when he'd developed his shots. "I got it, Arthur!" he shouted into the phone. "I got it. I had to go to Communion five times, but I got it."

John Paul II realized that the U.S. Catholic church — more specifically the renewed women's congregations, the engaged laity with highly networked women backed by many priests and some bishops — was the only entity in

The poor needed a church that was Jesus' yoke, actively easing the poor's burdens. The Vatican II bishops said amen to that.



the world loyal enough to the council, energetic and imaginative enough, educated and organized enough, wealthy and capable enough to challenge his pontificate's intention to undermine Vatican II reforms and reimpose a top-down rule. (Historically there had always been a dash of Euro-deceit within the Vatican and papal hubris: The Vatican may like Americans, but it doesn't admire them. Add to the late pope's anti-Americanism the West's repeated betrayal of Poland.)

The Wojtyla-Ratzinger response to a mobilized U.S. Catholicism was fierce. Oust or demoralize the conciliar Catholics, in America and elsewhere. Appoint U.S. bishops more Roman than American. So by the 1990s we had the Wojtyla-Ratzinger duo piously dictating a revisionist Vatican II to a body of near-traumatized bishops reduced to a papal clique and demoralized senior bishops. The new model is a re clericalized church with little faith in the faithful, none of that *sensus fidelium* nonsense. Make the educated feel unwanted and unwelcome by reimposing pietistic nonsense and childish attention to ritualized minutiae (the birdie-bobbing heads at Communion?) and bingo! it's the 19th century of blessed memory again. As a Wojtyla-Ratzinger Eurocentric and Euro-ecentric strategy, it's successful; as a model of church, it's pitiful.

The Wojtyla-Ratzinger continuum doesn't play only to empty pews. Hundreds of millions of heaven-bound Catholics just want Jesus. They stand in

Part 3

After 30 years with the newspaper, Arthur Jones, *NCR*'s editor at large, is retiring at the end of October. I asked Jones to reflect on his years as an editor here and provide us with some background as to what motivated his switch from being an international correspondent for secular magazines and newspapers to a career in Catholic journalism. I also asked him to sum up his thoughts as he looks at the church today. This is the third of four columns: The last will run in the Oct. 7 issue.

—Tom Roberts

8 RETROSPECTIVE

Continued from Page 7

line and question nothing. As is their right. Others, more pugnacious, Catholics steadfastly loyal and *questioning*, rooted in their eucharistic communities and New Testament realities, remain to demand better from the institution. People of large heart and devotion still confidently demur from much the Vatican would impose. *The New Yorker* lately quoted one of the sillier little U.S. bishops saying such folks are Mass-going non-Catholics. Hey-ho! There are very few bishops in this country who can cast the first stone about *anything*. (Fear not, folks, it's the memoirists, not the bishops' obituary writers, who get the final word.)

Numbers-wise, the U.S. church will initially comfortably crash-land on the backs of three generations of Vietnamese, Filipino and Latino immigrants, particularly the latter. Unless the immigrants' descendants and the currently activist volunteers can bolster the center and hold the U.S. church to its mission to the poor, Catholicism risks being one more lockstep sect comforting the comfortable by operating their charity basket for them.

The U.S. church's current vibrant center is those young Catholics who flesh out the Gospel and deepen their appreciation of the Jesus who began with the poor by serving the poor and continuing to demand systemic change. They and their involved and demanding parents and grandparents, and the supportive nuns and priests, they're the candles — soon to be relegated to backwaters in this new Dark Ages.

For, paradoxically, with re clericalization, the center is becoming the periphery. Which means the center cannot hold.

Indeed the center cannot hold as a force for social good and betterment under the Wojtyla-Ratzinger continuum. The continuum can't hold Latin America. For all its Eurocentricity, the late pontificate couldn't hold centrist Catholic Poles, whose rapid attrition a Polish pope couldn't prevent. Ireland's young Catholics have walked away. It won't hold young Asia or Africa. Not with its policies of disengagement from responsible 21st-century discussion. This church talks about moral relativism from a redoubt of declining social relevance — for it has lost its ability to persuade, to convince. It can only impose.

Catholicism in the public square? We're into the era of the museum-ization of Catholicism. Tot up how much has been spent rehabbing a dozen or so U.S. Catholic cathedrals and shrines in the past decade and you'd be astonished: from the \$25 million for Baltimore's basilica to nearly \$200 million for Los Angeles' Spanish box. Public Catholicism is U.S. Catholicism as a tour bus destination.

Public square? At the hierarchical level, a church that once linked arms with Dorothy Day and César Chávez will hold hands with the descendants of Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed. And the church will implode.

Implosion is what happens when there's no center.

Once, the Roman Catholic church was *almost* the universal signal for the progress of the peoples. The church in Brazil, through its Gospel-focused energy, could have shown the universal church how to live with the poor. The church in the United States could have become the universal church's test case for dealing with the frontier of most developed nations; materialism and

affluence, relativism and capitalism, rapid technological change, bioethical frontiers and declining social mores. The church in Asia has in its fiber the understanding of the interreligious cooperative spirit. The church in Africa could remind solemn, ponderous liturgists, who think Jesus spoke Latin, that Mass is about joy and Eucharist and thanksgiving and jubilant celebration in words people can understand.

The Catholic institution today is so disoriented it can't even repeat the best lessons of its own evangelizing past. The Irish missionaries like Columba and Drostan knew 1,500 years ago what to do. They looked for what was solid in the pagan stock and grafted Christianity on to it. (Think "inculturation.")

The solid stock in American life: the capacity to plan, to organize and execute the plan; the country's democratic ideals, equality of the sexes, the open forum, the premium on education, the thirst for the spiritual. That's enough for a bold church to build on.

Plus, this church could have a laity truly involved in the everyday life of church and society. But the new papacy-micromanaged church's eyes are scaled by central fixation: fear of losing lockstep control.

The issue here isn't about numbers, it's about the church's soul. A church that is not constantly renewed by the poor, not constantly intellectually stimulated by having to give an account of itself to challenge and dissent outside and in, is sterile. Period. Lack of open and continued debate about the contentious issues of church and society in the 21st century is not mere stupidity, it is intellectual cowardice.

The church welcomes its narrowing intellectuality. It is becoming intellectually bereft at a time when what's called for is a *wider* vision of the individual, a *wider* vision of the world, a *wider* vision of church, and a *wider* vision of God than its pietism, fundamentalism and conformity can tolerate.

Oh, there'll be folks who write in to say the church isn't about social justice and social change and systemic disturbance without, or about a world vision and transparency and dialogue and collegiality within. They're wrong, of course.

Jesus began and ended with the poor, and lived and died in disputation. He preached to "all nations" and dined with the outcasts, and he died with thieves. He disturbed the rich and powerful. The rich he told to change their ways. The religious hierarchs he scorned as nitpickers. Hey-ho! And they combined with the political rulers to crucify him.

The latest piety floating around the institution is that Catholicism is awaiting a new Francis. The church has had four decades of Francis and Clares worldwide and did everything it could to marginalize them.

Match the modern Francis and Clare's Jesus-inspired activist poverty against the anachronistic fixation on today's pomp; compare that to the gold threads and silks of the hierarchs' floor length dresses. The divide and distance between Jesus' call and the present-day institution couldn't be clearer: The Vatican public function has succeeded the British royal family as the television pageant of choice.

Back to the chronology. In 1980, and on schedule, after five-and-a-half years I brought in a new editor and publisher, left Kansas City (D.G.), and returned to full-time writing. A couple of cardinals said "Deo Gratias," too.



Learn to Fight Guns With Glue

Bob Schreier, C.P.P.S., has been dean of Catholic Theological Union and today is professor of doctrinal theology. More importantly, he is one of the leading experts in reconciliation in the world. Lately, he always seems to be hopping airplanes to places like Bosnia. In between globe-trotting as a speaker and peacemaker, Bob has published writings on reconciliation such as "In Water and in Blood: A Spirituality of Solidarity and Hope" which is widely valued as a guide to cooling political, religious and ethnic trouble spots around the world. Bob's spiritual glue not only slows down hatred but has helped hold together fragile agreements and commitments to peace.

Bob is part of a remarkable faculty that is comfortable camping in the bunkers of people's mindscapes around the world or just around the corner. He thinks this century's battles will be won with ideas, not bullets.

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CATHOLIC
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Italian lay movement forges alliances

Head of U.S. Knights speaks to gathering on working with evangelicals

By JOHN L. ALLEN JR.
Rimini, Italy



—Rimini Meeting 2005

A crowd of several thousand gathers at an Aug. 26 session during the Communion and Liberation meeting in Rimini, Italy.

An alliance between Catholics and Protestant evangelicals, focused on issues of sexuality and the family, could be “among the most important opportunities in all of American history” for the Catholic church to influence American culture, according to the head of the Knights of Columbus.

Supreme Knight Carl Anderson addressed a massive crowd of Italian Catholics Aug. 26 as part of a weeklong gathering in Rimini, Italy, sponsored by the Communion and Liberation movement.

The Knights of Columbus, with 1.6 million members, is the largest lay Catholic body in the world. Communion and Liberation, founded in 1954 by Italian priest Fr. Luigi Giussani, who died in February 2005, is one of the largest and most influential “new movements” in the Catholic church and is particularly close to Pope Benedict XVI.

Anderson’s prominent platform in Rimini hints at a growing rapport between these two important Catholic groups. Speaking through an Italian translator, Anderson told his audience of several thousand that American Jesuit Fr. John Courtney Murray, who helped shape a document on religious freedom adopted by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), argued in the 1960s that American Catholics should accept the legalization of contraception because other religious confessions

approved of it, and that not everything the church sees as sinful has to be prohibited by civil law.

That argument sounded good to many American Catholics, Anderson said, but it introduced a false distinction between “private” and “public” morality that today has led to acceptance of practices such as abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage.

“It weakened the capacity of the church to be present in social life,” Anderson said.

Anderson, a former special assistant to the president in the Reagan administration, sits on several Vatican bodies. He’s a member of the Pontifical Council for Laity, a consultant of both the Pontifical Council for the Family and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

After sketching the history of Protestant anti-Catholicism in the United States, Anderson said: “Ironically, as American culture becomes more secu-

larized, many Catholics are seeking a new informal alliance with their historical enemies, the Protestants, especially those with a strong Biblical morality on matrimony, sexuality and the family.”

The Communion and Liberation event drew an estimated 700,000 people to this seaside resort on Italy’s Adriatic coast.

Though the movement claims only a few hundred members in the United States, it is present in 60 American localities. Its top American official is Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, a charismatic theologian and writer, and, as a native Puerto Rican, a leading spokesperson for the United States’ growing Hispanic Catholic community.

Paid for by the Knights

Anderson and Albacete were among the founders of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Washington, which Albacete gratefully acknowledged was “created and paid for” by the Knights. Another founder was an Italian priest and Communion and Liberation member named Angelo Scola, today the cardinal of Venice.

The Knights of Columbus offers financial support to a wide variety of Catholic causes, in part on the strength of an insurance program currently

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He sings, he smokes, and he’s their American rep

When Communion and Liberation went looking for someone to fill the job of its public face in America, it struck gold in Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, currently its top man in the United States.

Born in Puerto Rico and fluent in both Spanish and English, Albacete, a roly-poly, beaming 64-year-old who doesn’t apologize for sneaking out of meetings for a Marlboro, is the kind of guy who explains the church’s teaching on matrimony by belting out mariachi love songs (and suggesting that they would sound better if accompanied by tequila). He’s an accomplished theologian and a former astrophysicist, but speaks in down-to-earth language that makes him a darling of the media.

In an interview with *NCR* during the Communion and Liberation conference, Albacete said he first met the group’s founder, Luigi Giussani, in 1993 through the efforts of an Italian priest named Angelo Scola, today the cardinal of Venice, Italy.

Albacete did his graduate work in physics and worked for a scientific lab in Silver Spring, Md., for 10 years, and was engaged to be married when he felt God calling him to another path in the late 1960s. He was ordained for the Washington archdiocese in 1973.

The product of a vivacious, yet thoroughly orthodox, Catholic upbringing in Puerto Rico, Albacete said he had a hard

time finding that combination in his new brother priests.

“I met lots of priests who were alive, free, spontaneous, understanding, wanting to share people’s lives in all their aspects, but they had problems with the teachings of the church,” Albacete said.

“On the other hand, I found priests who accepted the teachings of the church, but in a subservient way,” he said. “They were rigid, boring and afraid.”

In Scola, however, Albacete said he found what he had been seeking.

“He was not rebelling against the church,” Albacete said. “Yet he was the freest and most spontaneous priest I ever met. I kept asking him, ‘Where do you get that?’”

Albacete said he expected Scola to give him a theological answer. Instead, Albacete said, Scola responded: “I learned it from Giussani.”

Albacete said he kept asking Scola questions, until finally Scola suggested he meet with Giussani. Scola arranged a lunch for the two men in Milan, Italy, in 1993. It stretched over three hours.

Albacete said he went into the encounter with some trepidation, because he had always thought of being part of a movement as “limiting one’s horizons.”

Albacete said that at the end of the lunch, Giussani had tears in his eyes. When Albacete asked why, he responded: “I’ve been praying every day to the Madonna

to send me someone from the United States who could be a point of reference for us. If the early Christians had not gone to Rome, Christianity would not have spread. Today, you are Rome.”

Albacete’s response was probably not what Giussani expected.

“You tell the Madonna that I can find my own jobs,” Albacete recalled himself saying, with a laugh.

Nevertheless, he told Giussani that he would be happy to help out as he could, and gradually he developed contacts with Communion and Liberation people, becoming steadily more attracted.

“When I was in the lab, many people whom I deeply respected asked me how I could be a Catholic,” Albacete said. “I was searching for an answer to the link between faith and reason, between nature and the supernatural.”

In a sense, he said, Vatican II supplied the kernel of his answer in *Gaudium et Spes* 22, with its famous formula that “the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine.” The genius of Giussani, Albacete said, is that “he turned it into a life.”

“If being is love, then existence itself has the structure of love,” Albacete said, trying to synthesize Giussani’s insight. “Unity and the self, community and freedom, are not incompatible, but go together. The experience of belonging is not a limit, but it sets me free.”

Albacete said that despite his attrac-

tion to this idea, he still had reservations about Communion and Liberation, based on what he was coming to understand about their Italian profile. “I wanted to know what their problem was with [Cardinal Carlo Maria] Martini, whom I love,” Albacete said. “Or what about Paul VI, without whom I wouldn’t be here?” Martini was at the time archbishop of Milan.

Albacete said he was also leery of Communion and Liberation’s reputation as a “far-right” outfit, whose primary concern was secular politics. He said he pressed Giussani and his right-hand man, now his successor, Fr. Julián Carrón, on these points. “I didn’t see this in Giussani and the group around him,” Albacete said. “So far as I could see, they did everything they could to avoid it.”

When people ask him these questions today, Albacete said, his usual response is, “Why don’t you try it out and see for yourself?”

“If you see us imposing a far left or far right point of view, or if you find another movement that takes greater care of your human freedom, leave immediately, and then call me so I can follow you,” he said.

There’s no sense denying that when it comes to politics, the Communion and Liberation members do generally skew to the right. I spoke to two young Americans in Rimini, Greg Bacich, 24, who grew up

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worth more than \$6 billion.

Anderson offered the Communion and Liberation members an overview of the history of the Knights of Columbus, emphasizing its role in resisting anti-immigrant and anti-minority prejudice in the United States. He noted, for example, that the 1924 classic *The Gift of Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois was written as part of a Knights of Columbus project to illustrate the contributions of minorities in the country.

Picking up on Anderson's point about anti-immigrant prejudice, Albacete quoted from Samuel Huntington, who has recently warned against the dangers of a "Catholic mentality" taking root in the United States through Hispanic immigration.

"There is no American dream," Albacete quoted Huntington as writing in his 2004 book *Who Are We?* "There is only a dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society." Huntington sees in increased Hispanic immigration the dangers of a Catholic influence, which he views as antidemocratic.

Albacete sounded a note of caution about a Catholic/evangelical alliance.

"The problem in American Protestantism is that the figure of the Virgin is missing," Albacete said.

"Mary was the first human being to experience the fruits of liberation, and a Christianity that separates the church from Mary does not have the strength to protect human liberty." The assumption underlying his comments is that the only real liberty

occurs in the person of Jesus Christ, and that his entrance into human experience, in which Mary played a critical role, is an event that keeps unfolding throughout history.

The annual Rimini event (called by the English word "meeting") was launched by Giussani in 1980, and was given a major boost when Pope John Paul II attended in 1982.

Changed his life

Communion and Liberation is the "new movement" closest to Pope Benedict XVI, who volunteered to deliver the homily at Giussani's funeral in February 2005. Then-Cardinal Joseph

Ratzinger confided to a priest linked to the group that "Giussani changed my life." Currently serving in the papal household are four consecrated laywomen members of a group called *Memores Domini*, linked to the movement.

In the history of Italian Catholicism, Communion and Liberation has generally been seen as a conservative, high-political force.

Historically, the movement was perceived as a right-wing alternative to the "mainstream" lay group in the country, Catholic Action. Though tensions date back to the early 1960s, the definitive rupture came in 1986, when Catholic Action distanced itself from the Christian Democratic Party with

which the church had been identified since 1948. The idea was that the church should be in dialogue with all social forces, including the left. Communion and Liberation, on the other hand, argued for a more active "presence" in political life, which translated into a closer identification with the Christian Democrats and the right. The debate turned so bitter that some spoke of "mutual excommunications."

Communion and Liberation official David Rondoni, however, told *NCR* that historically it's difficult to locate Giussani on the political right, since he was the son of an anarchist who grew up in "humanitarian socialist" circles in Lombardy that have shaped a great

Continued from Page 9

in California, and Carlo Canetta, 21, from Connecticut. Both are now going to college in New York, an overwhelmingly "blue state," and both said unhesitatingly that they voted for George Bush in the 2004 election.

Yet both acknowledged that politics is not a special passion, and that the main attraction of Communion and Liberation and Giussani for them is that it helps unify their lives, as they figure out what faith has to do with their friendships and their university coursework. In itself, they insisted, this is neither a "conservative" nor a "liberal" instinct.

Though Communion and Liberation is

a massive phenomenon in Italy, it has had difficulty exporting itself. While it counts 60 "Schools of Community" in the United States, Albacete estimates the total American following at just a few hundred.

Albacete noted that unlike members of some movements, Communion and Liberation members go to their regular diocesan parishes and do not set up special structures. The only thing they add, he said, is a weekly catechetical meeting.

Albacete said that after a "School of Community" meets in a diocese two or three times, enough to know that it's likely to last, he and the local leaders request a meeting with the bishop to explain what they are doing and to ask for his blessing. Albacete said some have refused to meet

with them, on the grounds that "we don't need the movements in this diocese."

For the most part, however, Albacete said that as long as Communion and Liberation creates no problems, bishops are happy to have it. "A bishop is like an air traffic controller at O'Hare Airport," he laughed. "As long as the planes don't crash, he just wants to keep the traffic moving."

"When people ask me about our contribution to American Catholicism, I say that I don't know and I don't care," he said. "I have more urgent things to worry about, the concrete problems of everyday life. That's where the Incarnation occurs — either it's in real life, or it's all just words."

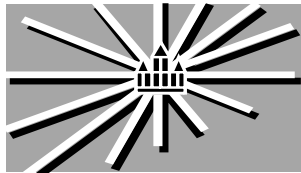
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deal of Catholic life in Italy.

Rondoni also said that the popular identification with Communion and Liberation and politics has more to do with the obsessive attention to politics in the Italian press, rather than the real concerns of the organization's members.

Today, most of those old battles seem to have receded.

Most Americans involved in Communion and Liberation who were interviewed here, including leaders, say that it is the ideas of Giussani on matters such as the reasonableness of faith, the need for faith to penetrate all areas of culture, and the centrality of Christ that attract them to the movement, not its political history.

Msgr. Gerald Mahon, 59, pastor of St. John the Evangelist parish in Rochester, Minn., was among the small number of Americans at the Rimini event.

"For me, there was always a split between the experience of daily life and my relationship with Christ," he said. "I loved the priesthood, loved the church, and [Communion and Liberation] opened up a life for me in which all these things come together."

Mahon acknowledged, however, that he was initially hesitant.

"I was always reluctant about movements," he told *NCR*. "I thought it was a kind of club, and I wanted to stay with the bigger picture. My concern was anything that would take me away from the parish. I think there are movements which do that, so I don't want to deny the possibility."

"My experience of CL has been the

opposite," he said. "This has helped me become more alive as a pastor."

"I don't see it as conservative or liberal," Mahon said. "It's about making the person of Jesus Christ the heart of everything I do."

Mahon has created a monthly meeting for priests and a weekly Communion and Liberation catechetical session called a "School of Community"

*"I don't see it as
conservative or liberal.
It's about making the person
of Jesus Christ the heart
of everything I do."*

—Msgr. Gerald Mahon

that draws 35 people. Still, he said, he sometimes hesitates to "push" Giussani or the organization he started in his 4,000-member parish.

"I haven't figured out yet how to integrate this thing I love with my parish community," he said.

Understanding life

Greg Bacich, 24, who grew up in California, and Carlo Canetta, 21, from Connecticut, are both attending college in New York and are both part of a Communion and Liberation group for university students. Both met the movement while they were in high

school through summer camps operated by the organization.

"They looked at me with a seriousness that no else had at that age," Canetta said. "They talked to me about understanding the meaning of life and of vocation."

Bacich agreed. "I went to a Catholic high school, but even there, most people looked at you as stupid if you ever talked like that," he said. "Even the teachers weren't really into it."

"I grew up Catholic, but it was always just something my family did," Bacich said. "We went to church on Sunday, but it didn't have anything to do with me. In CL, it became a life."

Canetta said he met people who think he is in a cult, but he sees it differently.

"To me, a cult means following somebody blindly. It's exactly the opposite for us. We're always pushing each other to give reasons for what we do."

"College life can be really difficult," Canetta said. "In CL, they insist on judging every aspect of your life, really thinking your way through things."

The Rimini "meeting" included 136 workshops, lectures and roundtables; 16 art exhibits; 10 live musical and theatrical productions; two soccer and basketball tournaments for youth; and an international basketball exhibition involving the national teams of Italy, Finland, Ireland and Turkey.

One of the livelier sessions featured Italian journalist Giuliano Ferrara, who represents something of an Italian analogue to the Catholic/evangelical alliance in the United States. There are

few evangelicals to speak of in Italy, but there is a significant class of secular "lay" intellectuals, historically opposed to the power and privilege of the church, who are nevertheless cultural conservatives with a growing sense of common cause with Catholics.

On abortion, for example, Ferrara was blunt, challenging the notion of some American scientists that a fetus does not feel pain.

"Aside from the fact that this is entirely to be demonstrated," Ferrara said, "from a secular point of view, I say that in an abortion, those who suffer, beyond the fetus, are also the mother, and the brothers and sisters of that fetus who could have been one of us; it's me, it's all of you, and it's the entire society, because abortion is a modern scandal."

Ferrara said abortion should remain legal, but it should not become an instrument of birth control.

Gay marriage?

"It's a screenplay from [Spanish surrealist director] Pedro Almodovar more than a secular contribution to civil progress," Ferrara said.

Finally, Ferrara took a swipe at forms of evolutionary theory that exclude God. "It's very difficult to combine the idea of liberty with the idea that an intelligent principle within biological evolution does not exist. It seems obvious to me that, at 3 p.m. on a summer afternoon, your being here can't be reduced to mere chance or necessity."

[John L. Allen Jr. is *NCR* Rome correspondent. His e-mail address is jallen@natcath.org.]

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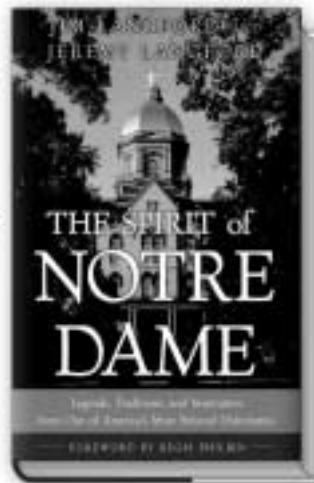
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Jailed Haitian priest's health worsening, says physician assistant

By CLAIRE SCHAEFFER-DUFFY
Catholic News Service

The health of an imprisoned Haitian priest is deteriorating, said Johanna Berrigan, a physician assistant, who visited him in late August.

Berrigan, of Philadelphia, said Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste had lost weight and was suffering from injuries sustained during a beating that occurred just before his arrest July 21. Berrigan, who is a member of the Catholic Worker movement, visited Jean-Juste Aug. 23 and 25 at Haiti's National Penitentiary in Port-au-Prince, where he has been held without charges since his arrest.

"He seems very tired, in pain, has tenderness in his abdomen and is experiencing swelling in lymph nodes in neck and under arms," she wrote in an e-mail interview.

Jean-Juste was arrested in connection with the death of a prominent Haitian journalist, Jacques Roche, who was abducted and killed in early July. The priest was in Miami at the time of Roche's death but attended his funeral, where an angry mob accused Jean-Juste of murdering the journalist and beat him. Police later claimed they arrested the priest based on the "public clamor" at the funeral.

Jean-Juste remains in legal limbo, said Bill Quigley, a law professor at Loyola University in New Orleans and one of the priest's defense attorneys.

"No judge has been willing to accept responsibility for his case, and there is

no announcement about any plans to charge him," Quigley said in late August.

The priest's supporters say his arrest, the second in 10 months, was politically motivated. The pastor of a poor parish in Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, Jean-Juste is an ally of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and an advocate for human rights. A fierce critic of Haiti's interim government, he has repeatedly called for Aristide's return.

For the past month, Jean-Juste has been confined to a small, unlit basement cell in the National Penitentiary. The prison houses most of the country's political prisoners.

Berrigan and Auxiliary Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton of Detroit traveled to Haiti to seek medical help for the priest and to try to obtain his release after learning he had collapsed in prison.

"I was almost dead Sunday morning. I fell unconscious for some time but was rescued when some of the other prisoners took me on their backs to the dispensary. God sends me back to you," the priest wrote in a letter to his supporters dated Aug. 16.

Berrigan said although Jean-Juste was physically not well, he remained "spiritually strong." She said he spent most of an hourlong visit discussing the mistreatment of fellow inmates. He was particularly concerned about the physical abuse of mentally ill inmates and the status of imprisoned deportees



—Zuma Press/Lannis Waters

Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste in the Church of St. Claire in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in May

who have been returned from the United States and are without legal representation, she said.

On Aug. 24, Jean-Juste was examined by a prison doctor; two days later he was moved to an annex of the penitentiary for medical treatment.

"He should get better medical attention, but he will be even more isolated," said Quigley.

More than 2,000 individuals and organizations, including 29 U.S. representatives and numerous Catholic groups, have sent faxes and e-mails to U.S. and

Haitian officials calling for Jean-Juste's release. Amnesty International has declared him a prisoner of conscience.

NCronline.org

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton spoke about his visit with Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste during his Aug. 28 homily. Read it in *The Peace Pulpit* on NCronline.org.

Palm oil pushed as alternative to coca growing

By ANASTASIA MOLONEY
Latin America Press
San Pablo, Colombia

Fourteen months ago, Bellanira Galán and her husband were barely surviving as yucca and rice farmers, earning around \$155 a month. To supplement their income, they grew coca — the raw material of cocaine.

Working as an itinerant *raspachin* (coca leaf-picker) or a cook in the cocaine processing labs, Galán could earn around \$100 every two weeks.

But then the Galán family was forced to abandon their small farm and 10 acres of coca after the food and coca crops were destroyed by U.S.-sponsored crop-spraying planes. They moved to San Pablo to find work and discovered that the fields of coca surrounding this town in northern Colombia had been cleared over the past two years to make way for thousands of hectares of oil palm trees.

With funds from the U.S. government and private investors, Colombia has created 29 oil palm plantations giving jobs to roughly 3,000 families of former coca growers.

With the urging of a local community leader, the Galán family signed a

contract with the government's Program for Alternative Development. In return for not growing coca, they were given jobs at the plantation.

José Miguel Pérez, president of Asopalma, an association of local oil palm growers, says that getting farmers to join alternative crop programs is a gradual process.

"You have to get the farmers to value and appreciate the palms, so that families not only hand over their coca fields but really believe in the project," he said. The scheme also severs the business links and dependency between coca farmers and drug traffickers.

Introducing palm oil is not without its challenges. Setting up a plantation requires intensive labor and long-term investment. It takes up to four years before a new oil palm tree can yield a crop.

Palm oil producers have to endure price fluctuations in the world market and stiff competition. For example, producing palm oil in Colombia is around 30 percent more expensive than in Malaysia, the world's major palm oil producer.

The Colombian palm oil industry hopes that promoting palm oil as a biodiesel will boost demand and profits.



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Pope meets with schismatic leader

By JOHN L. ALLEN JR.
Castel Gandolfo/Albano, Italy



—CNS/Rogue Pictures

In Rome's latest effort to heal the only formal schism in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Benedict XVI met Aug. 29 with Bernard Fellay, superior of the breakaway Society of St. Pius X, founded in 1970 by French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.

Lefebvre's decision in 1988 to ordain Fellay and three other bishops (Bernard Tissier de Mallerais, Richard Williamson and Alfonso de Galarreta) without the pope's permission led to a formal rupture between the Vatican and Lefebvre's movement, which is attached to the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass and staunchly opposes many liberalizing reforms that followed Vatican II.

On-again, off-again talks between Rome and the Society of St. Pius X have been underway since 1999.

The 35-minute encounter with Fellay took place at Castel Gandolfo, the pope's summer residence outside Rome, which is near the Italian headquarters of the Society of St. Pius X in Albano.

Pope Benedict was accompanied by Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, who heads the "Ecclesia Dei" Commission created in 1988 to handle relations with the "Lefebvrites" and other Catholics attached to the older Mass.

Benedict's decision to grant an audience to Fellay so early in his papacy is a sign of desire for reconciliation, and both sides strove to put the best face on their encounter.

"The meeting developed in a climate of love for the church and of desire to arrive at perfect communion," Joaquin Navarro-Valls, Vatican spokesperson, said in a declaration.

The use of the phrase "perfect communion" suggests, according to Vatican sources, that the pope recognizes that some degree of communion with the Lefebvrites already exists.

The Society of St. Pius X, meanwhile, issued a statement indicating that the

Pope Benedict XVI waves to the faithful from the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, Aug. 28.



—CNS

audience "was the occasion for the society to manifest that it has always been attached, and always will be, to the Holy See, eternal Rome."

Prior to the encounter, rumors had circulated that a quick end to the schism might be in sight, with the Vatican offering to create an "apostolic administration" for the Lefebvrites and granting universal permission for celebration of the old Mass.

Yet in the wake of the meeting, neither side attempted to disguise the serious roadblocks that remain.

"Although conscious of the difficulties, the desire was expressed to proceed in degrees and in a reasonable time period," Navarro-Valls said.

The Lefebvrite statement was even more pointed.

"The Society of St. Pius X prays so that the Holy Father may find the strength to put an end to the crisis of the church," it said.

One sign of the still-tense nature of the relationship is that Fellay was brought into and out of the papal palace at Castel Gandolfo through a side entrance, away from gathered journalists, and his name did not appear on the pope's official list of appointments.

At the headquarters of the Society of St. Pius X later that afternoon, Fellay granted one interview to the Italian state television network RAI, but turned away everyone else. At one stage, an Associated Press television crew was granted an appointment, only to be told shortly thereafter to leave the premises.

Today, the Society of St. Pius X claims roughly 200,000 followers worldwide in 27 nations, with 450 priests, 180 seminarians, 50 brothers and 110 sisters, six seminaries, three universities, 20 secondary schools and 50 primary schools.

It was then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who, in 1988, was asked by John Paul II to oversee negotiations to avoid a schism. Ratzinger worked out a "protocol of agreement" with Lefebvre, promising to appoint a bishop to

head the society and requiring only that the Lefebvrites approach doctrinal disputes with "a positive attitude of study and of communication with the Apostolic See, avoiding all polemics."

Lefebvre, however, balked at the last minute and went ahead with the ordinations. In response, John Paul excommunicated Lefebvre and the four bishops. Lefebvre died in 1991.

Though the celebration of the Mass in Latin is their signature issue, the objections of the Lefebvrites to trends in the contemporary church run much deeper. Generally, they worry that ecumenism and interreligious dialogue risk a loss of Catholic identity, putting the church on the same level as other religions. John Paul II's 1986 interreligious gathering in Assisi, for example, drew fierce criticism from the Lefebvrites. They are also concerned that separating church and state means neutrality between vice and virtue.

Current efforts at reconciliation date to 1999, when Castrillon wrote to each of the four bishops, addressing them as "my dear brother" and saying that the pope's arms were open wide to embrace them.

A meeting between three of the bishops and Castrillon took place on Aug. 14, 2000, in Rome.

One public signal of progress came on Aug. 8, 2000, when more than 1,000 members of the society entered St. Peter's Basilica for a prayer service to mark the Jubilee Year. Though the event had not been on the Vatican calendar, officials acknowledged it had taken place with the approval of the Holy See.

Some within the Lefebvrite camp have been skeptical of such efforts.

At the time of the 2000 meeting, for example, Bishop Richard Williamson wrote: "I do believe that behind the cardinal... there are villains at work, either Judeo-Masons or prelates working for Judeo-Masonry, who are far more sinister than this cardinal is. ... [Castrillon] is, in Lenin's phrase, a useful idiot who will be cast aside the moment he no

Schismatic Bishop Bernard Fellay, superior general of the Society of St. Pius X, smiles as he arrives at his residence in Albano, Italy, after a 35-minute meeting with Pope Benedict XVI in Castel Gandolfo Aug. 29.

longer serves their forward march to the one world religion."

Williamson was also critical of the meeting between Fellay and Benedict XVI.

"In fact, a Rome-Society of St. Pius X agreement seems impossible," he wrote in July. "And of course if the society rejoined Rome, the resistance of Catholic tradition would carry on without it, and if the pope 'converted,' then instead of the gentle war now being waged on his right by tradition, he would be faced with a savage war being waged on his left by the cabal of neo-modernists. Either way, the war goes on between the friends and the enemies of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Yet observers believe that both sides have incentives to press forward.

For the Lefebvrites, Benedict XVI is a clearly sympathetic pope; Fellay greeted his election in April by saying he represents "a gleam of hope that we may find a way out of the profound crisis which is shaking the Catholic church."

Benedict, meanwhile, sees the Lefebvrites as potentially valuable allies in his struggle against a "dictatorship of relativism" in the developed West.

For now, observers say, the Vatican is likely to continue pursuing a two-pronged strategy: offering an olive branch to the leaders of the Lefebvrites, while continuing to attract as many traditionalist Catholics as possible back into the fold through other means. The Vatican has already created institutions for Catholics attached to the old Mass, such as the Society of St. John, which is in union with Rome. In the diocese of Campos in Brazil, it created a special apostolic administration to allow former adherents of Lefebvre to reenter full communion.

Italian spokesperson Alessandro Zangrado told *NCR* that Fellay had requested the meeting with Benedict in early July, and that the society was "surprised" it was granted so quickly.

A senior Vatican official told *NCR* that no further meetings with the pope are planned, but that Castrillon will continue the talks.

Zangrado told *NCR* that one recent move from Pope Benedict has given the Lefebvrites alarm: his appointment of Archbishop William Levada of San Francisco as his successor at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Under rules approved by Pope John Paul II in 1984, the pre-Vatican II Mass can be celebrated only with the "indult," or permission, of the local bishop. Levada did not grant that indult in San Francisco, though he did permit it while archbishop of Portland, Ore.

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Tuesdays with Father Yogi

By RENÉE LaREAU
New York

It is 6:15 p.m. in midtown Manhattan, and the New York City rush hour is in full swing. Commuters flood the Columbus Circle subway entrance in the shadow of the behemoth Time Warner Center, and tourists amble about Central Park's southwest corner. One block away, at St. Paul the Apostle's parish center, preparations for an unusual Tuesday-evening parish meeting are taking place.

New Yorkers of all shapes and sizes, clad in T-shirts, spandex and sweatpants, drift into a darkened second-floor room and take their places on thick charcoal-colored blankets. Some lie on their backs, eyes closed. Some sit cross-legged on small foam blocks, chatting quietly with one another. Others stretch their hamstrings intently. Backpacks and bags stuffed with the day's castoff professional attire line the hallway outside, while quiet flute music emanates from a CD player in the front of the room. To the casual observer, it is not quite clear whether what is about to take place is a workout or a retreat.

FAITH AT LARGE

But one who sticks around for more than a few minutes learns that it's both. Part retreat, part workout, it's the hottest parish meeting this side of Lincoln Center. Welcome to week six of Meditation and Yoga for Christians, taught by Paulist Fr. Thomas Ryan.

Ryan, 58, tall and trim, takes his place in the front of the room on a slightly elevated platform, his demeanor confident and pensive. He leads the class in singing a five-minute Taizé chant, and offers a brief homily, placing the practice of yoga in the context of the Lenten season. He shares e-mails from absent participants, including one who has recently been diagnosed with stage four tongue and throat cancer.

"We begin tonight with an awareness that this class has a communal dimension like this Lenten season we are in," Ryan says. "Think of the others who need you to be here. We offer this prayer of ours for them tonight. When one of us is missing, this class literally isn't the same without you — and that's true for us as church as well."

Ryan, a certified Kripalu yoga instructor, warms up the group with a series of stretches, offering brief commentaries on each position.

"This pose is a restorative pose," he says, as participants lie on their backs with hips elevated and legs in the air. "It sends blood to the heart, giving the heart a rest."

"Now this pose is good for the end of the day," Ryan says, as he bends over and grasps his toes in a seated position, back arching upward. "You are conserving energy, preparing your body to go to bed for a peaceful night's sleep."

After a brief period of instruction, Ryan leads the class in yoga prayers, a series of postures and stretches set to music. Following his lead, a sea of 25 sets of limbs wave through the air, rotating, flexing and scissoring in rhythm to a musical rendition of evening prayer Psalm 141.



Fr. Thomas Ryan lead the yoga class at St. Paul the Apostle Parish.

—Photos by Amy C. Elliott

Looking across the room during this one-hour-and-45-minute class, one can almost see the stress of a workday melt away in a New York minute. A sense of peace and collective wellness is palpable, a sense that is confirmed talking with some of Ryan's yoga devotees.

Though their ages range from early 20s to mid-80s, and their careers range from stay-at-home mom to Web designer, they are uniformly staunch in their commitment to the integration of yoga into Christian spiritual practice.

Maria Lonczak, 43, drives 50 miles from northern Westchester County to attend Ryan's class.

"The way he ties yoga to Christian spirituality is extraordinary to me," she said. "Other yoga teachers have taught me the breathing and the different positions, but I have never been a part of a class that includes time for meditation."

Kate Van Tassel, 27, a program associate at an environmental justice agency, values the uniqueness of a communal experience of bodily prayer. "You don't find this anywhere else. In the city, it's rare that you get to pray in silence with other people."

"Plus," she said with a laugh, "it's great for my back."

For Ryan, whose 1991 sabbatical in India inspired him to seek professional yoga training, carving out 20 minutes of communal meditation time is simply a matter of staying true to the original purpose of yoga, a 3,000-year-old discipline.

"Yoga first emerged as a physical practice designed to enhance one's ability to sit in meditative poses longer by strengthening the hips and back," said Ryan, director of the Paulist North American Office for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations. "When yoga was brought to the Western world somebody made a marketing decision early on to detach it from its context of spirituality, lest market share be limited. Thus yoga has been marketed as the latest fitness fad workout-type exercise."

A fitness fad so popular in the Big Apple, in fact, most yoga classes are overcrowded, which discourages many potential participants. For filmmaker George Rivera, Ryan's parish-based class is a welcome respite from the city's jam-packed yoga studios.

"There was an article written a couple of years ago about the fact that yoga has become a contact sport in New York," said Rivera, 50. "It had become so popular that classes were getting very competitive and aggressive, and there was an assumption on the part of instructors that you were a high-level practitioner. If you weren't, they didn't have a lot of patience for you."

As an instructor, Ryan exemplifies attentiveness to the varying degrees of strength, flexibility and balance in adult bodies. He demonstrates adaptations to each yoga pose as his

relationship between prayer and almsgiving actually playing out in practice," Ryan said.

When Ryan first pitched the idea for the program to the parish, he was met with a healthy dose of skepticism.

"I told people I wanted to offer a 10-week series and they said, 'Oh no, you'll never get that kind of commitment from New Yorkers — they're too busy. You'll have to do it on a drop-in basis.'"

Ryan tried the drop-in class, but the lack of continuity bothered him. He decided to take a chance and advertised a 10-week class. "I said, 'Forget this. I don't care what they say about New Yorkers.' And when I asked people for the commitment, the class size doubled."

Kim McNamara, a 38-year-old nurse, attends the class weekly with her husband, an attorney. "Sometimes it's hard to get here," she said. "But we always walk home saying to each other that it was well worth it. With most exercise you don't get this spiritual component."

Ryan's students speak of the class not only as a fitness experience, but also as one of communal prayer.

"It's different from working out with people you have no connection to whatsoever," said Rivera. "These are people you see on other occasions around the parish."

Though some of Ryan's yoga students are taking the class for a second or third time, most of them are new to the experience of praying with the body. According to Ryan, the practice is something that blends seamlessly with a Chris-



Fr. Ed Novak, a priest in Ryan's community, takes the class.

An Embodied Christian Spiritual Practice" (Sounds True), in response to former students' requests for a take-home video. Throughout the 90-minute DVD, he integrates yoga postures with some of the same traditional Christian prayers he uses in his Manhattan class.

"There are classic Christian prayers people may have been praying their whole lives, but from the shoulders up — never through their whole person. To enter the prayer this way is a fresh and sometimes quite powerful experience for people," Ryan said.

Just ask the busy New Yorkers in Ryan's class. Evidently, denizens of the city that never sleeps do take some time to practice yoga, pray and meditate with one another. They're nourished by it. They love it. And they'll be back next week.

[Renée LaReau is the author of *Getting a Life: How to Find Your True Vocation*. She writes from Columbus, Ohio.]

'Our Christian theology is very clear in asserting that this body may be biodegradable but it is not disposable.'

—Fr. Thomas Ryan

assistant, Bernadette Latin, who teaches the class when Ryan travels, offers individual instruction during the course of the evening.

Ryan, who also skis, swims, rollerblades and lifts weights, has offered Meditation and Yoga for Christians at St. Paul since 2000. He teaches four or five 10-week sessions from September to May, with an average attendance of 30 people. Participants pay \$100, and the classes earn nearly \$8,000 annually for the parish's charitable works.

"It's a great example of the theoretically tight

tian theology that prizes the body in doctrines of Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven.

"Our Christian theology is very clear in asserting that this body may be biodegradable but it is not disposable," Ryan said. "God wants the whole you, and your body is not going to be sent away like a banana peel or a recyclable bottle."

Ryan recently authored his ninth book, *Reclaiming the Body in Christian Spirituality* (Paulist Press), which all of his students receive upon signing up for the class. In addition, he created the newly released DVD, "Yoga Prayer:



Though their ages range from early 20s to mid-80s, and their careers range from stay-at-home mom to Web designer, participants are uniformly staunch in their commitment to the integration of yoga into Christian spiritual practice.

A Chilean champion of the poor

Labor leader Clotario Blest lived a life both holy and heroic

By JERRY RYAN

Long before there was liberation theology, there was Clotario Blest.

He died peacefully May 31, 1990, in his little room in the Franciscan Convent of the Recoleta, Santiago, Chile, where he had been given hospitality during the last months of his life. He had refused supper and asked the Franciscan community to pray for him, as he expected to die that night. He was 91 years old and weighed 73 pounds. He was buried in his robes marking him as a third order Franciscan.

The following day the workers of Chile observed a minute of silence in memory of Clotario — a gesture of gratitude for all he had done for them. Testimonies of admiration and appreciation abounded. I have before me a yellowing copy of a newspaper that often opposed him, announcing on the front page: "*Ha Muerto Un Hombre Bueno*" ("A Good Man Has Died").

Don Clota, as he was affectionately called, was a thorn in the side of successive governments, be they of the right, left or center. Yet not even his most bitter political enemies could question his integrity. Most of the great champions of social justice had their Achilles heel. Martin Luther King was no model of marital fidelity, Dorothy Day had her turbulent past; Clotario Blest was one solid piece, totally consequent all his life.

Before I met Don Clota, all I knew of him was that he had succeeded in uniting all the Chilean trade unions in a single federation, which he directed for eight years. I learned the

details of his earlier life from his obituary notice. He was the son of a schoolteacher. He lost his family early, entered the seminary and discovered the social teachings of the church through a controversial Jesuit, Fernando Vives Solar.

Clotario soon realized that he wasn't cut out for clerical life. Some sources say he was expelled from the seminary for organizing a student protest against the rector. While studying law, theology and chemistry at the University of Chile, he worked for the Department of the Treasury. At that time, government workers were forbidden to unionize. To get around this, Don Clota formed "athletic clubs" for public workers. Little by little these "clubs" evolved into de facto unions that were eventually recognized.

In 1952 he was named general secretary of a commission seeking to unify all the labor unions throughout the country. This resulted in the Central Unica de Trabajadores, or CUT. Clotario was elected president, a post he held until 1961, when the Communist Party sabotaged his leadership and obliged him to resign. The CUT would remain a powerful force in Chilean society. But once sectarian politics entered the picture, the movement lost the integrity it had under Don Clota, its unity torn apart by petty intrigues.

Clotario never joined a political party. For him, parties divided the working class. Clotario spoke not without humor of the 25 times he had been imprisoned; of his friendship with Che Guevara (Clotario and Che were

named co-presidents of the International Youth Conference in La Havana in the 1960s, when Clotario was already more than 60 years old); of his admiration for Luis Emilio Recabarren, the founder of the Chilean Communist Party. Recabarren had tried to unite the working class around noble ideals, but ultimately committed suicide out of frustration. Recabarren was for Clotario what Peter Maurin was for Dorothy Day.

Greatest triumph

Don Clota's greatest triumph, up to that time, was the 1955 national strike that paralyzed the country and established the CUT as a formidable force. Clotario recounted how the then-president of the republic, Carlos Ibáñez, unable to govern, had summoned him to his office and offered him his chair and the presidential sash. Clotario simply repeated the demands of the striking workers.

I first met Clotario in 1970. When Salvador Allende was elected president, the Swiss owners of the foundry where I worked decided to "visit their families" in Switzerland and take their capital with them. Six hundred of us were about to lose our jobs. A delegation asked President Allende for state intervention. Thus it was that our plant was among the first to be nationalized.

The government had a plan for worker participation through "production committees." I was elected to head the committees in my section. Neither I nor the other delegates had a clue about what we were supposed

to do, so we consulted the different political parties that composed Allende's coalition government — Socialists, Communists, Christian Left, and so on. They came in suits and ties and told us what the workers wanted and how to get it by toeing the party line. It was all too obvious that these guys wanted to use us. Finally someone suggested that we invite Clotario Blest.

Clotario was already in his 70s, a living but apparently harmless and irrelevant legend. He did not show up with a suit and a tie, but looked like a homeless beggar — about 5 feet tall with a stubbly beard and missing a few teeth, in overalls and a battered beret. He asked us what the workers wanted.

Don Clota worked with us for two and a half years, encouraging us in a certain direction without ever dictating what we were to do. The workers themselves decided. Our role was to inform, suggest and try to carry out





—Marcelo Montecino

‘As long as there is an oppressed person in the world, the true revolutionary will be at his side, oppressed with him.’

the decisions of the assembly.

The results were dramatic. People who had been treated like dirt all their lives suddenly awakened to their own worth. If they spoke up, it would be taken into account. Guys whose only interests had been booze, sex and the horse races discovered whole new dimensions of life. I saw them develop their innate gifts, become concerned for others.

Our foundry quickly became a sign of contradiction. For some, it was a model to be imitated; for others it was a dangerous and disruptive innovation. Both the left and the

right saw us as “anarchists.” Conflicts with government representatives led to a strike and to our occupation of the foundry. To President Allende’s credit, the government dialogued with us and eventually satisfied our demands. But this incident led to the convocation of a “congress” of the workers, where the government restricted our participation.

The cards were stacked against us in this “congress.” Most of the participants were brainwashed members of the Communist and Socialist parties. We did, however, succeed in getting Clotario Blest named “hon-

orary president” of the congress before the debates got underway.

We gave it our best shot. We got creamed anyway. At the final session of the debates, Clotario asked to give the closing speech. This bizarre-looking little old man, hardly visible behind the speaker’s stand, spoke for a half hour on “The New Man According to St. Paul and Che Guevara.”

“The revolutionary, the real revolutionary, does not play games; he pays with his person,” Clotario said. “He knows how to be born in poverty and to remain in poverty and to die in poverty. As long as there is an oppressed person in the world, the true revolutionary will be at his side, oppressed with him. The New Man does not seek honors, he does not seek power, he does not seek praise. He seeks only the good of others. He has no room for self.”

You could hear a pin drop in the auditorium. The government “revolutionaries” seated on the stage in their suits and ties were squirming in their seats, their faces taking on various shades of crimson. As Clotario gathered steam, a weight was lifting from my shoulders. Even though we had lost, we had won.

Under Pinochet

That was the last time I saw Clotario Blest. Shortly after that, Augusto Pinochet pulled his coup. I had to leave Chile. Clotario’s house was raided, his books and papers confiscated, he was beaten and humiliated — but the government dared not arrest him. All we had built was torn down.

I never had a private conversation with Don Clota. He lived in an old house on nothing but his government pension with his shaggy dog Momio, a nickname for reactionaries. True to his title, Momio was fat, lazy and expected others to do everything for him. Clotario spent much of his time looking after a little old lady, bedridden and lonely.

I was told that Clotario, in his comings and goings, silently prayed the rosary he kept in his pocket. Clotario’s relationship with the institutional church was similar to that of Dorothy Day. He refused to be identified with it, just as he refused to belong to any particular party. In this, Don Clota was at odds with the soon-to-be-canonized Padre Hurtado who tried to promote “Catholic” trade unions outside of the CUT. The perspectives of these two men were radically different. Hurtado saw trade unions as an apostolate of charity where workers and capitalists would fraternally work things out; for Clotario the interests of labor and capital were directly opposed and it was a Christian duty to struggle for social justice on behalf of all.

In his later years, during the Pinochet regime, he began to affirm his faith more explicitly in public. I don’t think this was an “evolution” or a “regression” but a sure instinct. During this long and brutal oppression, when all secular hope appeared

chimerical, Clotario believed that he had to reveal the source of his own obstinate defiance of evil and hypocrisy, of his strength and optimism. He, Clotario, was nothing, but he could hope all things in Christ, who chose the rejects of this world to work wonders.

Yet he wanted to be free of hierarchical control in order to appeal to *all* sectors of society. Clotario avoided direct criticism of the church but would not hesitate to oppose any compromise with the powers of this world. He would quote the Gospel. Church leaders could do nothing about Clotario. His own life was one solid piece of evangelical logic and poverty. Very likely they also realized that Clotario was saying things they dared not say, perhaps could not prudently say because of political compromises. The archbishop of Santiago, Carlos Oviedo Cavada, insinuated as much in his homily at Clotario’s funeral.

Conversion

The only groups that could claim Clotario were the workers, the poor and the marginalized. His message was addressed to all, and it was a message of individual and collective conversion. No one practiced what he preached with more simplicity and humility than Don Clota. He drank only water. He ate only fruits and vegetables. He slept very little on a miserable excuse for a mattress. He never married because “I didn’t have time for that.” He was, in fact, engaged at one time, but decided that he needed to dedicate himself entirely to his struggle for justice. His fiancée entered the Discalced Carmelites and died in 1988 with a reputation for great holiness.

Don Clota had absolutely no illusions about the forces of evil; he confronted them head on and suffered the consequences. He was beaten, jailed, reviled, humiliated. But, though he always employed nonviolent tactics, he was no absolutist about these methods. He believed that people had the right to defend themselves against oppression. He even supported the popular militias as a deterrent against the forces of fascism. He sympathized with the Cuban revolution — at least in its beginnings — and fully admired Che Guevara. He was pragmatic about the means necessary to confront evil. When armed resistance was obviously suicidal, he became an outspoken pacifist and was even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the German government.

After the Pinochet coup, he refused to shave until the tyrant was ousted. He died two months after the referendum that toppled the Pinochet government. Patricio Alwyn, the new president-elect, went to visit Clotario at the convent. He came with a very simple request: “Don Clota, please pray for me.”

Clotario cannot be pigeonholed. He was not a “pacifist,” a “corporatist,” a “Trotskyist” or any sort of “ist.” He was a prophet, with a prophet’s vision of a peaceable kingdom where all goods were shared, coercion was unnecessary, and love and justice made all things new.

[Jerry Ryan is a writer in Boston. He lived in Chile from 1969 to 1973.]

Growing up, at whatever age

'The 40-Year-Old-Virgin' is a good guy at heart; superhero kid in 'Sky High' proves himself

By JOSEPH CUNNEEN

In this summer of movie discontent, one quickly learns to avoid blockbusters and wonders if Hollywood will ever rediscover how to make a romantic comedy. Judd Apatow's **The 40-Year-Old Virgin**, written in collaboration with former "Daily Show" correspondent Steve Carrell, doesn't really fill the bill, with its penis jokes and bodily fluids humor. But Mr. Carrell plays Andy Stitzer, the title character, as such a likeably insecure salesman that the film is more good-natured than gross.

A moralist might note that none of its makers seems to have had a bachelor uncle who believed casual sex was morally wrong. In fairness, however, the script makes clear that while Andy's coworkers in an electronics store find his condition ludicrous and go to great lengths to "help him out," they have their own difficulties with both sex and romance. David (Paul Rudd) has sworn off women after being dumped by his girlfriend; Jay (Romany Malco) still plays the field despite having a longtime girlfriend; and Cal (Seth Rogen) is always looking for sexual escapades in the wrong places. When they discover Andy's secret, they try to set him up with easy conquests, all of which naturally end up as hopeless failures. One young woman nearly kills them both by driving drunkenly through crowded streets; then she scares him away again when they reach her home.

Fortunately he stumbles by himself into a more human relationship with Trish (the delightful Catherine Keener), a single mother who seems genuinely to care for him. His pals, of course, tell him not to see her until he's had sexual encounters with women he doesn't like.

Much of the comedy is taken up with painful moments in Andy's sexual past or with the ludicrous attempt by his friends to make his hairy body more attractive through a painful waxing process. In the interest of journalistic accuracy, I must report that the audience, including many young women, seemed to find such scenes hilarious.

Fortunately, after Andy's fumbling failures to put on a condom during a hectic sequence interrupted by the arrival of two of Trish's children, the movie shifts from sex to romance. With Andy helping Trish's teenage daughter through a group therapy session, his basic decency is seen to outshine his eccentricity. Trish doesn't yet know Andy's "guilty" secret, however, and they decide the culmination of their relationship should not come before 20 dates. This process may not show the couple getting to know one another deeply, but it does help to suggest the range of Mr. Carrell's acting ability.

Some attempts at humor seem forced, as if Mr. Carrell and the director are trying too hard, but a brief exchange between Andy and his woman boss, who promotes him and makes clear she is willing to help him overcome his "problem," is done with confident expertise. The ending of this flawed but amusing movie is hardly a surprise, but the director gives it a nice sense of fantasy, the whole cast dancing and singing



Steve Carrell and Catherine Keener in "The 40-Year-Old Virgin"

—CNS/Universal



Kurt Russell and Michael Angarano in "Sky High"

—Walt Disney Pictures

exuberantly to the music of "Hair."

Sky High is a Walt Disney comedy about a young would-be hero, Will Stronghold (Michael Angarano), about to attend a secret prep school on what looks like a large flying saucer above the clouds. Director Mike Mitchell obviously hopes to attract *Harry Potter* fans, but drowns any potential magic in overactive special effects and obvious moralizing.

The movie almost redeems itself by gently mocking Will's superhero parents, Commander Stronghold (Kurt Russell) and Jetstream (Kelly Preston). "All I ever wanted," the father laments when he learns that Will has been put with the Sidekicks rather than the Heroes at Sky High, "was for him to save the world."

He will get his comeuppance, because an old enemy disguised as a senior, Gwen Grayson (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), will almost succeed in a sinister plot to turn all the school's

heroes into babies she will train to be villains. But in its goodhearted if lame-brained way, "Sky High" has Will discover his late-emerging powers and the Sidekicks unite to help him foil the plot and save the school. Each is able to use their small powers — glowing, turning into a puddle or changing shape — thus reinforcing the lesson that each of us has a talent we should employ to the fullest.

Some of the character changes are confusing — for instance, the transformation of Warren Peace from a flame-throwing destructive force into Will's defender — but the goodheartedness of the friendship among the young people almost saves the movie. And though all the young women are too pretty in the luscious Hollywood manner, Will's friend Layla (Daniele Panabaker), whom he almost betrays, has substance. Remarkably for this movie, her powers, which she has consistently used only when it was helpful for oth-

ers, fit her character. We see her quietly reviving flowers and admiring natural beauty; only when Will is seriously threatened does she turn on the juice, hurling thick powerful tendrils that imprison the attackers on the ceiling. The two will make a suitable generational replacement for Will's parents, but I hope they don't make a movie out of it.

[Joseph Cunneen is NCR's regular movie reviewer. His e-mail is SCUNN24219@aol.com.]


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Cathy Breazeale of Gulfport, Miss., surveys damage to her home caused by Hurricane Katrina Aug. 29.

—CNS/Reuters

Stormy weather blows Americans' breath away

BIG WEATHER: CHASING TORNADOES IN THE HEART OF AMERICA

By Mark Svenvold

Henry Holt and Company, 290 pages, \$26

Reviewed by RICH HEFFERN

Last year on the evening of May 22, Nebraskan Will Togsted's two-story house was lifted straight up into the air and whisked off by a tornado. Author Mark Svenvold interviewed Mr. Togsted afterward.

"There was a greenish sky, and then, in the blink of an eye, everything turned black. ... Then it got real quiet," Will recalled.

Then came a thunderous downpour unlike anything Will had ever seen in his life. ... He saw



debris sailing sideways very high in the sky. As Will descended the

basement stairs and turned around, he saw the screen door fly away. ... [then] from his position near the furnace, Will felt a sudden, tremendous pressure drop. ... He looked up and saw above him the floor joists, row upon row of support beams upon which the first floor was anchored, all of them suddenly moving as one to the northeast. The house then lifted and sailed off with the storm.

Mr. Svenvold's book describes the severe spring weather that plagues the Midwestern United States every year. The author rides along with a new breed, the "storm chasers," men and women who in their SUVs prowl the back highways of Oklahoma, Kansas or Nebraska in the months of May and June waiting for super-sized thunderstorms to develop, hoping to catch a glimpse of and

record on film or camcorder their most fearsome spawn, the funnel clouds that pounce on towns and trailer parks.

He tags these adventurers *paparazzi del cielo*.

Mr. Svenvold coins another new phrase, "catastrophilia," to describe a cultural phenomenon he's observed. "As we've become increasingly insulated from the physical world, the weather, the shifting of air masses, the ever changing atmosphere, has become one of the few things that seems solid in an increasingly ephemeral world."

We are particularly fascinated, according to Mr. Svenvold, by the extremes of weather — the cyclone or the paralyzing ice storm or the destructive flash flood. It's a "near-death" experience, one that usually involves the "near-death" of others, not our own. Last week's wide coverage of Hurricane Katrina is a good example.

Mr. Svenvold chronicles the dramatic evolution of the Weather Channel from a small niche on the early cable television spectrum to a hugely profitable venue with a gigantic national audience. The Weather Channel's success owes much to its regularly scheduled "Storm Stories" features that highlight the dramatic effects of "big weather" — hurricanes, floods and tornadoes — on human life and our puny structures.

For nearly 20 years, however, the Weather Channel has carefully avoided focusing much attention on what Mr. Svenvold calls the "biggest weather story of our time" — global warming. Finally in May last year, the channel announced an official position on climate change. Mr. Svenvold is dismayed, however. "They clouded and distracted and soft-pedaled the issue, reflecting the Weather Channel's desire to maintain a position of expedient detachment about the role of human manufacture and consumption — our role — in exacerbating [global warming]."

Read this absorbing book. Try not to get anxious, though, when thunder rumbles over the horizon.

[Rich Heffern is an editor with *Celebration Publications* and a frequent contributor to *NCR*. His e-mail address is rheffern@ncronline.org.]



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A postmodern perspective on Vatican II

By ROBERT ROYAL

One benefit of writing a column is that readers are quite spontaneously kind enough to offer remedies for your ignorance, tomfoolery and knavery. On the whole, I welcome these messages because they usually wake me up to something. Recently, for example, I received an e-mail with a column by Emeritus Archbishop Rembert Weakland attached, offering advice to Benedict XVI about "pastoring the whole flock" in light of the Second Vatican Council. It reminded me that the 40th anniversary of the close of the council (Dec. 8, 1965) is in sight and will doubtless elicit truly staggering quantities of commentary. So I've decided to get my oar in early. *Après moi le déluge.*

The archbishop, an intelligent man who has long represented one segment of the American church, identifies what he believes have been four main responses to the council: outright rejection; interpretation of it as nothing new and a demand for permission to celebrate Tridentine Latin Masses; *ressourcement* (a return to early Christian sources) about lay participation, collegiality and local input; and a radical view of the council as *passé* because it did not address priestly celibacy, married clergy and women. The categories, he admits, are not exhaustive, good news for me since, with all due

respect to the archbishop, I do not recognize myself in them and know few people who would.

Depending on the company you keep, the two extremes may loom large. To me, rejecters of the council are small and dwindling hands and do not promise much anyway. The middle two groups, however, oddly leave out a lot of contemporary Catholicism. I believe

THE LION'S DEN

Vatican II was a great glory of the church, for instance, and also love the Latin Mass. We have now settled enough into *aggiornamento* that a few Latin Masses should not be a threat to anyone. In fact, I would go much further. The widespread Catholic loss of Latin is worrisome. Like it or not, the church and the entire West conducted religious and intellectual business in Latin for 1,500 years. Catholics without Latin are like Jews without Hebrew: We are divorced from our own history as a people. My family, like many others, would find Latin-only liturgies every Sunday challenging. But the church as a whole should find an honored place for our ancient liturgical language precisely as part of *ressourcement*.

Lay participation, collegiality and local governance are, for me at this moment, quite tangential to shepherd-

ing a cohesive and vibrant flock. True, they might help prevent future pedophilia crises, lessen some tensions, but not much more in a world that badly needs fixing of a far different sort. Besides, the history of the Reformation is full of such fissiparous experiments, which usually ended up in bitterly antagonistic churches.

In the archbishop's analysis, two problems lie behind all the others: a crisis of authority and dialogue with modernity (perhaps postmodernity would be more accurate). He sees, as many others have, *Humanae Vitae* as a watershed. But we ought to revisit Paul VI's document in light of experience.

We now have quite good empirical confirmation of Pope Paul's prophetic wisdom and that, in turn, might help us better understand papal authority. Before the contraceptive and sexual revolutions, the percentage of children born out of wedlock, with all the known potential for social pathologies, normally ran in single digits. Today, the American rate is roughly 33 percent, about three-quarters of blacks and one-quarter of whites. And this does not include the 40 million aborted children.

If we were not blinded by certain assumptions, these facts would jump out at us. A number of social scientists have recently argued that "abstinence only" programs do not work. In the very short term, that may be true. But

we have a much larger potential data set. Prior to contraceptives, the whole world practiced "abstinence only" education. In those backward times, illegitimacy was one-fifth of what it is now and did not require killing millions yearly.

In the commemorations of Vatican II, we will not see much discussion of evidence such as this about papal authority or what it may tell us about the church and postmodernity. I wonder why, because it seems to me that Paul VI was as prophetic about the consequences of contraception as Leo XIII was about communism.

A friend told me that his son called from World Youth Day and reported something you probably did not read about in the papers, which were mostly occupied with interviewing young people who do not agree with Catholic morals. My friend's son was with an English-speaking group. When Pope Benedict began addressing the crowd in English, they all started weeping without knowing why. I do not know why either, but in the highly unlikely event that the pope were to ask me about "pastoring the whole flock" in light of Vatican II, I would advise him to pay attention to this story.

[Robert Royal is president of the Faith and Reason Institute in Washington.]

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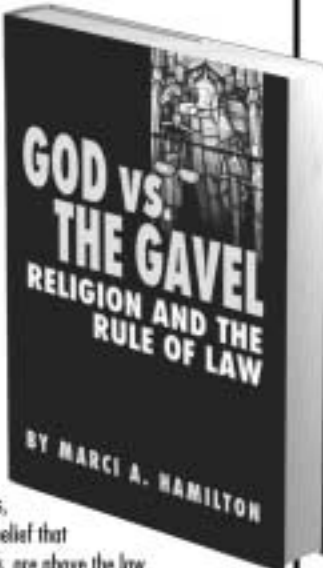
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Bush support for India's nuclear program takes the wrong path

President George W. Bush, during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last month, agreed to provide India with access to sensitive nuclear technology and sophisticated nuclear-capable weapons systems. This proposed agreement represents a dangerous misunderstanding of how America can best use foreign assistance in support of economic development and international security.



STEPHEN ZUNES

To begin with, it does not require India to eliminate its nuclear weapons program or its ballistic missile systems, as called upon by a 1998 U.N. Security Council resolution, or even to cease production of weapons-grade plutonium that enables India to further expand its arsenal of more than three dozen nuclear warheads.

Furthermore, in order for the proposed U.S.-Indian agreement to be implemented, the Bush administration will need Congress to amend the U.S. Non-Proliferation Act of 2000, which bans the transfer of sensitive nuclear technology to any country that refuses to accept international monitoring of its nuclear facilities. It will also mean contravening the rules of the 40-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group, which controls the export of nuclear technology and to which the United States is a signatory.

Coupled with President Bush's announcement last month of its intention to sell \$3 billion worth of nuclear-capable military aircraft to Pakistan, it raises questions regarding the admin-



—AFP/Getty/Deshakalyan Chowdhury

A schoolboy protests the proposed U.S.-Indian nuclear agreement during a demonstration in Koltaka, India, Aug. 6.

istration's commitment to arms control and nuclear nonproliferation.

Even if the nuclear assistance now being offered by the United States were somehow limited solely to peaceful uses, this agreement would still be bad for India. Advanced industrialized countries have found nuclear power to be an extremely dangerous and expensive means to generate electricity and there is little likelihood India would be any better at handling such hazardous technology. As evidenced by the 1984 accident at a Union Carbide chemical facility in the Indian city of Bhopal, which killed more than 20,000 people, there are serious questions regarding the ability of Indian authorities to adequately safeguard the public from

major industrial accidents.

India's interest in procuring additional nuclear technology is ironic, moreover, given that the man who led the country's struggle for freedom from British colonialism, Mohandas Gandhi, was not only a pacifist and an opponent of the partition of his country between India and Pakistan, but also opposed centralized control of basic necessities like energy — whether it be by the state or private corporations. Were he alive today, Gandhi would not only be leading the struggle against the proposed U.S.-Indian nuclear agreement, he would be an outspoken advocate for small-scale, locally controlled renewable energy and other appropriate technologies, such as solar power.

India ranks 118th out of 164 countries on the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index, ranking below even the impoverished nations of Central America. More than 400 million Indians are illiterate, more than 600 million lack even basic sanitation and more than 200 million have no safe drinking water. Surely, if promoting "sustainable development" in India is really the goal, as President Bush claims, there are certainly better ways to do that than by building nuclear power plants.

For more than two decades, arms control experts have argued that the most likely scenario for the hostile use

of nuclear weapons was neither an exchange between the former Cold War superpower rivals nor an act of terrorism by an underground terrorist group, but a war between India and Pakistan. These two South Asian rivals have fought each other in three major wars — in 1947, 1965 and 1971 — and have engaged in frequent border clashes in recent years in the disputed Kashmir region, coming close to another all-out war as recently as 2002.

Neither Pakistan nor India has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and both countries have dozens of nuclear warheads and hundreds of medium-range missiles. The proposed technology transfer would constitute a violation of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which calls on existing nuclear powers not to transfer nuclear know-how to countries that have not signed the treaty.

For more than a decade, the U.S. government has forcefully challenged Russia not to provide nuclear technology to Iran, despite the fact that Iran is many years away from developing even one nuclear warhead and the Russian-Iranian nuclear agreements have had more stringent safeguards than the proposed U.S.-Indian nuclear agreement.

The best hope for genuine peace and security in the region would be the establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone for all of South and Southwest Asia, similar to those that already exist in Southeast Asia, Latin America, Africa and the South Pacific. The Bush administration has rejected such a proposal, however, in favor of a kind of nuclear apartheid whereby the United States gets to support nuclear development for governments it likes while threatening war against governments that it does not like when they attempt to develop nuclear programs.

Maintaining such double standards regarding nuclear proliferation presents incalculable dangers to regional and global peace and security. It is simply not worthy of a country that asserts the right to global leadership.

[Stephen Zunes is a professor of politics at the University of San Francisco and the author of *Tinderbox: U.S. Middle East Policy and the Roots of Terrorism*.]



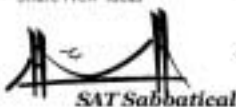
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Anglicans make room for Mary

Seattle Statement says what Vatican II should have

Last spring the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission surprised ecumenical circles worldwide when it released a joint statement on doctrinal matters related to the Virgin Mary, "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ." Reporting on the document for *NCR* on June 3, John L. Allen predicted that the Seattle Statement, as the document is subtitled, may well come to be seen as a "significant turning point" in ecumenism. I hope he's right.

By CHARLENE SPRETNAK
VIEWPOINT



—CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz
The coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is depicted in a 90-year-old stained-glass window at St. Mary of the Isle Church in Long Beach, N.Y.

Why was the joint statement from the International Commission so surprising? It was the first time in the 40-year history of ecumenical dialogue following Vatican II that a group of Protestant theologians moved substantively in the direction of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice concerning Mary, instead of the other way around. The Seattle Statement reaches the conclusion that it is perfectly reasonable theologically for Anglicans to accept the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption and the practice of asking Mary to pray for us. Since all three of these aspects of Catholicism are considered by many Catholic "progressives" today to be embarrassing holdovers from pre-Vatican II days before the church's teachings on Mary were modernized and "uncluttered," the Seattle Statement squarely challenges prevalent assumptions about the Catholic role in ecumenical dialogues.

In ecumenical conferences and commissions, the Virgin Mary has usually been considered the deal-breaker, the big problem blocking rapprochement. Because the council fathers at Vatican II declared that ecumenism was suddenly the top priority for the Catholic church, it followed that the church's Marian doctrines had to be streamlined and drastically reduced so as to be more agreeable to our "separated brethren." In this decision, they reflected the growing influence of the "biblical movement" among several Catholic theologians in the late 1950s. Though only a scant 2 percent majority of the council fathers held this view when the major vote on Marian doctrine and practice was taken at Vatican II on October 29, 1963, that narrow victory sent the church on a new and far more Protestant trajectory regarding Mary.

In the chapter on Mary in the new constitution of the church that emanated from Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (The Light of Humankind), Mary is dethroned as the symbolic Queen of Heaven and even as the Mother of the Church. Instead, Mary is honored solely for being a "helper" and an "associate of the Redeemer." The chapter does not use Mary's traditional titles of Advocate and Mediator, noting only that she has been called those things in the past. Rather, it emphasizes that Christ is the one and only Mediator, while allowing that "by her maternal charity" Mary "cares for" Christians still on earth. Mary is celebrated solely

as a member of the church, who was a "model and excellent exemplar in faith and charity."

As expected, this "Protestantizing" of Catholic doctrine about Mary was welcomed by Protestants who were then willing to participate in ecumenical dialogues. In recent decades, the biblical parameters have led many Catholic "progressive" theologians to focus on newly discovered information about the historical conditions of the life of the Holy Family. These theologians are fascinated with archaeological findings that suggest the probable size of Mary and Joseph's stone house, what food Mary cooked, how close the neighbors' houses were, and so on. This more "rational" approach is contrasted by some progressive Catholic theologians with the stubborn yet regrettable presence in religion of the symbolization of mystical divine presence. Some even rationally explain away the Virgin Birth, for example, as Mary's probably having been raped by a Roman soldier or a neighbor because God acts in the real, biological world. In truth, I can hardly recognize this focus as religion at all. Is not the Incarnation and all that followed from it a mystical event? What is to be gained by declaring off-limits the mystical elements in human engagement with divine presence? What remains if we deny the aesthetic, poetic, metaphoric, symbolic, cosmological ways in which humans have sought to describe and commune with the divine? What remains is the modern project, which always shrinks the immeasurable down to human proportions.

In the Seattle Statement, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission distances itself early on from the dominant "hyperhistorical" emphasis found in contemporary lib-

eral Roman Catholic theology about Mary. It also takes a scriptural tack that is decidedly different from the one used in Vatican II's chapter on Mary in the constitution of the church. Rather than emphasizing that Mary is merely a model "helper" and member of the embryonic church, the commission builds a scriptural case throughout the first half of the document for the entirely "distinctive" and "unique" (a word

that appears 10 times) existence and role of Mary in the Incarnation and the Redemption. Far from being merely the first Christian, merely our sister and a plucky social-change activist who declared the Magnificat, Mary's utterly unique and extraordinary being, decisions and actions are seen as good reason for her to be given special veneration and a unique status among saints. That is, the Vatican II statement on Mary sought to contain her, while the International Commission's statement, working from the very same scriptural base, brings to bear a theological sensibility marked by openness, a tender rather than hardened mode of reflection and an appreciation of spiritual beauty—all rather rare in committee writing.

In the conclusion of the document, the commission offers its study as a careful, ecumenical reading of the scriptures that illuminates "in a new way the place of Mary in the economy of hope and grace." The commission crafted this new way from the middle of the spectrum of contemporary positions on Mary, having nothing to do with the politics of the Catholic right or the hyper-rational biases of many Catholic progressive theologians. The Seattle Statement creates a new Marian space not only for Anglicans and for the ecumenical endeavor but also for Roman Catholics who welcome the post-Vatican II focus on scripture but also appreciate the earlier perceptions of Mary's full spiritual presence. With discernment, the excesses that had developed in that tradition could be left behind without destroying its spiritual depth and radiance. The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission has expressed what Vatican II should have said about Mary but didn't.

[Charlene Spretnak is author of *Missing Mary: The Queen of Heaven and Her Re-Emergence in the Modern Church* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), which is being released in paperback in September.]

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Internationalizing Iraq is our best option

Predictions of 30-year war in Iraq underscore the need for an exit strategy

Back in September 2002, James Webb, assistant secretary of defense and secretary of the Navy in the Reagan administration, raised a specter that has come back to haunt us. "The issue before us," he wrote in *The Washington Post*, "is not simply whether the United States should end the regime of Saddam Hussein, but whether we as a nation are prepared to physically occupy territory in the Middle East for the next 30 to 30 years."

Recently the International Institute of Strategic Studies, a prominent London-based think tank, concluded that the United States will be in Iraq until 2010 because of the difficulties in establishing law and order. University of Michigan Mideast expert Juan Cole sees this estimate as optimistic. "The guerrilla war," he writes, "is likely to go on a decade to 15 years." Paul Rogers, a diffident Oxford military expert, now echoes Mr. Webb. His "ostensibly rash" conclusion is that "a 30-year war is in prospect." On June 19, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice acknowledged that America's involvement in Iraq is indeed "a generational commitment."

Mr. Webb had warned about our not having an exit strategy. In an August 2002 television interview, Charles Krauthammer, the well-connected neo-conservative columnist, explained why not. "We don't speak about exit strategies," he noted. "We are going to stay." Responding to concerns about the cost, he explained, "If we win the war, we are in control of Iraq, it is the second largest source of oil in the world, it's got huge reserves. ... We will have a bonanza, a financial one, at the other end." Today we can see that while Mr. Krauthammer was wrong about the bonanza, he was right about the prolonged stay.

Currently the occupation is going poorly. One reason is the indiscriminate tactics used by U.S. forces. Whole



—CNS/Reuters

U.S. soldiers from the 34th Armor Regiment search for insurgents and weapons in the Iraqi town of Baquba, north of Baghdad, Aug. 3.

By **GEORGE HUNSINGER**
VIEWPOINT

towns — from Fallujah to Ramadi and now to the desert villages around Qaim — have virtually been flattened. Fred Kaplan, the "War Stories" columnist for the online magazine *Slate.com* and a former military correspondent for *The Boston Globe*, comments: "Leveling towns, bombing every suspicious target in sight — this is not how hearts and minds are won or how persistent insurgencies are defeated." Indiscriminate tactics, of course, also violate morality and the laws of war.

It is not surprising that the occupation lacks wide popular support. Civil-

ian casualties — already in the tens, and perhaps hundreds, of thousands — are steadily on the rise. Among children, malnutrition has doubled and mortality has tripled. Hospitals still lack basic medicines and equipment, water and electricity are in short supply, stagnant sewage pools in the streets, half the population is unemployed and prices for food are inflated. Car bombs, assassinations, kidnappings and strikes from American forces are a daily occurrence. At least 1 million refugees have fled the country.

Those who insist on "staying the course" overlook the unpleasant fact that the occupation is the main cause of the insurgency, not its cure. Outstripped and illegitimate, it will only bring more death and destruction.

Although no good options exist, the least bad choice would still be "internationalization." A viable exit plan might include the following:

- The United States should cease all offensive military operations, withdraw from population centers and

announce that it plans to depart in six months.

- An international conference should be convened under the auspices of the United Nations. Participants should include Russia and China along with the United States, Iraq's current interim government and representatives of the various insurgency groups. An agreement should be hammered out for a cease-fire and a viable plan to hold the country together by creating strong incentives for the various blocs and factions.

- An international peacekeeping force should be established, consisting of U.N. blue helmets along with forces from the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, until the Iraqis can take over on their own.

- Iraqi security forces should be trained under international auspices, with special attention being paid to respecting human rights.

- Plans for permanent U.S. military bases should be abandoned, and the American embassy (now the world's largest) should be reduced to normal size.

- A generous aid package, with no strings attached, should be offered to rebuild what the war has destroyed.

As unpalatable as such a strategy may be to our national pride, it is as prudent, principled and ambitious as the quagmire permits. It is arguably more "realistic" than continuing to fight indefinitely against a growing insurgency that is increasingly sophisticated in weaponry and tactics. It is also more realistic than current rumored plans for a merely partial withdrawal. These plans have a double drawback. They risk moving so quickly that Iraqi security forces would collapse, yet they would also keep the U.S. military bases intact, thus sowing the seeds for future preemptive wars. Those who object to this path as unrealistic need to explain how we can better extricate ourselves from the biggest U.S. policy disaster since Vietnam.

[George Hunsinger is McCord Professor of Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and coordinator of Church Folks for a Better America, an online initiative for peace.]

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In praise of higher taxes

My landscape architect just told me she would provide two surveyors' estimates — and she assured me that I could take the one that cost the least. I wondered why she pegged me for a Wal-Mart person, one who wanted a bargain at all costs. Why did she automatically assume I was cheap? Not frugal, but cheap. Frugal is a matter of paying the right price for the right thing. Cheap is different. Cheap pinches pennies until the life behind the pennies is also pinched. Cheap is getting a bargain that turns out, often, to be very expensive.

By **DONNA SCHAPER**
VIEWPOINT

When it comes to the redesign of my property, I want beauty not cheapness. I am going to be living with this land for a long time. I don't necessarily want the most expensive survey either. What I want is a good survey, something that the great extravagance of my public and private educations will allow me to see, understand, analyze and enjoy.

Permit me to differ with my landscape architect and make myself generally unpopular. I am for higher taxes. I am for them because I don't think democracy is a bargain. I think it is a costly extravagance. It has expensive hopes like liberty and justice for all. We

can't afford *not* to pay for these hopes.

Even in "Taxachusetts," the public budgets for health, education and security are pinched. I can't imagine not wanting to spend money on my children's — or your children's — education. Taxes for education strike me as a bargain, an investment with lifelong dividends. The idea that community colleges have to plead for the state to fix their roads or heat their buildings strikes me as a very expensive bargain. Short term, it balances state budgets only to elect politicians whose legacy will be potholes of the road, body, mind and spirit.

The Wal-Martization of citizenship has the same dangerous case of short-term-itis as most elected officials do. People get hurt in these potholes. Take the ridiculous story of low-income students being charged in transitional assistance benefits for scholarships won. Most people don't know that a low-income student gets into trouble if he or she gets a scholarship. How? That money is counted against their welfare or transitional assistance. Now, there's a bargain for you: Keep a whole generation of people in hamburger jobs. Or consider the consequences of long-term federal debt. We spend; our grandchildren pay.

I know enough about the near sentimentality of how much people with grandchildren love their grandchildren. In many cases, they are actively saving to give them a nice inheritance. Not taxing ourselves in the present, for

the present, particularly for wars we choose by presidents we elect, is taking money out of our grandchildren's pockets. If this were not immoral and a perfect example of short-term-itis, it is at least dumb. Or consider what happens

Here is a new movement for you: Have every low-income person in the country put a sign around her or his neck, "Tax me."

when research and development departments get underfunded. Better hybrid cars aren't made. Cures for terrible diseases do not happen. These matters cost the environment and our personal health. There are more ways to look at a family's budget or a nation's budget than just numbers. Cancer costs a lot more than taxes over time.

Education is not just about jobs, nor is the environment just about research. Education is primarily about itself, about opening the doors and windows of the heart and mind. The good taxable jobs that result are an important side dish. Every dime we don't spend on taxation today will result in a lesser citizenry tomorrow, both in their own life terms and in the terms of the social order. Employers who resist higher taxes will

have only themselves to blame when their next generation of employees can't add, think, imagine or write.

There are workplace consequences to short-term-itis.

Instead of always looking for a bargain and always hiring the cheaper surveyor, as a matter of paltry principle, why not imagine yourself as someone worth something good? Not just the better dress but also the better democracy, as a citizen and shareholder in a country that has expensive dreams?

Internalized Wal-Mart thinking sells our future to the lowest bidder. Wal-Mart surely has a positive place in our world. Applying discount thinking to health, education and welfare, however, is different from applying it to toothpaste. It is not a bargain when the state keeps people in low-income jobs by not giving them an educational leg up.

Here is a new movement for you: Have every low-income person in the country put a sign around her or his neck, "Tax me." Translated, "Tax me" means give me an income, not a handout, so that the tax base can increase. Again morality coincides with common sense: Well-devised citizens make good workers — and increase the tax base.

Cheaping out on taxes is a long-term mistake made for short-term reasons. It is not the bargain it claims to be.

[The Rev. Dr. Donna Schaper is a minister in Coral Gables, Fla.]

LETTERS

Boston laity

■ Your cover story and accompanying editorial on the state of the church in Boston (*NCR*, Aug. 26) makes one proud to be a Catholic Bostonian. The laity are rising out of the pews in rebellion. As Capt. John Parker of the Lexington Minutemen said in 1775, "Let it begin here."

JOHN MOYNIHAN
Swampscott, Mass.

Irresponsible wealth?

■ After reading your special section on wealth and responsibility (*NCR*, Aug. 12), I would like to add another perspective on the topic.

In May I visited our sister parish in El Salvador. The nine of us spent the mornings working in a newly established community, some of us painting and others digging a trench using picks, shovels and machetes. People drew their water from a deep well they had dug by hand. The homes had dirt floors. The children, full of curiosity, admonished each other to stay away from the wet paint, even though their clothes were well worn. I realized later they likely had few others to wear. The cows were bony, and the dogs and cats looked like animals in an ad for famine relief.

A Filipino parishioner on the trip said that was how life is in the Philippines. A visiting priest from Uganda said that is the picture of life in his country. Certainly it's like that in the slums of Kingston, Jamaica, where I once visited.

I began to feel uncomfortable. I read somewhere that we of the United States consume 40 to 50 percent of the world's

Reader's profile

Editor's note: When we have room, NCR will from time to time offer offering profiles of some of our most frequent contributors to the Letters page.

(The Rev.) Martin Deppe
Age: 70

How long have you been reading *NCR*?
Periodically for many years.

How many of your letters have been published in *NCR*?
Ten since January 2003 (including the one in the paper today).

Do you have a favorite letter you've published?
Not really. I think the favorites did not get published! Such as the recent one I sent on military recruitment guidelines, which I believe is so very important for our young people.

Job?
Retired United Methodist pastor who served six churches in the Chicago area



over a 39-year period. I was a founding member of SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference)-Operation Breadbasket, Chicago. I have written many social justice resolutions for my church on the local and general church level. I worked with Bob Hoyt before he started at *NCR*.

Tell us about your family life.
Walk my dog, Sandy, every day, enjoy the fruits of the good earth, care about my grandchildren and all God's 'chillien.'

What stirs you to write letters?
After 9-11, I began to have sleepless periods at night for the first time in my life. I would get up, jot down my thoughts and go back to bed and fall asleep. Someone suggested I share these concerns, and after a few letters were published I was in a rhythm. My wife says this is now my pulpit. I hope that's not true.

Anything else you'd like our readers to know about you?
I am most concerned about interfaith dialogue, within the Christian family and between Christians, Jews and Muslims. This is a critical need today.

resources. Am I consuming four or five other people's fair share of the world's goods? Would Manuel and Elena have running water and enough food for their children if I didn't require so many things? Would Mino and Transito be able to educate their children beyond the fifth grade?

Yet I'm frightened at the prospect of cutting back in some radical way. I don't

know where to begin. I'm hoping that God will grace me with some answers and, more important, with the courage to live out the answers when they come.

MARY C. WINGATE
Longview, Wash.



■ The contrast between obese Ameri-

cans and starving people in Niger and Mali is grotesque and disgusting. As of Aug. 11, the Federal Aviation Administration has raised the average weight guidelines for male passengers and carry-on bags 15 pounds up to 200, and for females, 34 pounds up to 179. Airlines are expected to use these figures to calculate airplane weight and center of gravity. My guess is that many human beings in sub-Saharan Africa weigh little more than the shocking increases of fat over here!

What can we do? Throw up our hands! Blame the two-year drought! Blame the governments! I say it is time to take action in solidarity with our sisters and brothers dying daily in these African deserts. I say let us, in the words of the prophet Joel, "sound the alarm, blow the trumpet, sanctify a fast."

Let us, especially the overweight among us, commit to fast six meals a month, two full days of eats, in whatever combination our individual health requires, and send the money saved to an aid agency of our choice, earmarked for relief in Niger and Mali.

This ever-so-slight redistribution of Earth's plenty would be a genuine movement in sister- and brotherhood, saving the lives of desperate humanity, those emaciated starving folk in far off Africa and those "super-sized" overweight Americans here at home.

(The Rev.) MARTIN DEPPE
Chicago

Reactions to Fr. Cushing

■ Isn't it the strangest phenomenon that Bishop J. Kevin Boland of Savannah, Ga., punishes Fr. Robert Cushing

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for acting and speaking out on the most important moral issue of the 20th century: the use of nuclear weapons on human beings (*NCR*, Aug. 12)? I suppose the bishop is too busy raising money, condemning abortion, etc., to pay attention to the real American moral issue: the atomic bombing of human beings. The person who raises the moral issue is punished, and those Catholics who think it fine to firebomb 200,000 men, women and children are not rebuked or even told there is a moral issue here. What good is such a bishop who, as the Gospel puts it, complains about a speck in Fr. Cushing's eye while not noticing the beam in his and his Catholics' eyes?

Bishop Boland is so blind that he can't even recognize the voice of a prophet in his own diocese who raises that fundamental moral issue. And like all the other prophets, Cushing must be put to death. The bishop wouldn't know a real moral issue if it came up and bit him on his gluteus maximus.

PETER J. RIGA
Houston

■ What is wrong with those people of St. Teresa of Avila parish who seem to have a serious problem with the compassionate priest who risked apologizing to the Japanese for the United States' terrible bombing of their cities, which Pope Paul VI called "butchery of untold magnitude"? Apologizing is always the Christian thing to do.

Christ has asked us to "turn the other cheek," not to take revenge. Dialogue with our enemies, not retaliation, is the Christian thing to do. Only that kind of response will bring a peaceful solution. This holds true also for responding to the terrorists. Retaliation brings more retaliation.

(Sr.) ARLENE WELDING, SSSF
Nashville, Tenn.

■ The story about Fr. Robert Cushing reminded me of my trip to Pearl Harbor, where I visited the memorial that has been built over the U.S.S. Arizona. The ship is still at the bottom of the sea, and the 1,132 bodies of American sailors and officers blasted to pieces that day were never retrieved.

A man on the tour was crying. His wife explained that several of his friends had been killed during World War II. He was a senior when he quit school so he could enlist. I put out my hand and said, "I want to thank you and all the other men and women who fought in that terrible war so we could have the freedom we enjoy today." He was crying as he whispered, "Thank you."

I was in the fourth grade in December 1941, and patriotism was high during the war. I am sorry that so many lives were lost when the atomic bombs destroyed the two Japanese cities. However, the Japanese started the war with their treacherous attack on Pearl Harbor. They could have surrendered after the first bomb, but they chose not to do so until after the second bomb was dropped, three days later. If the bombs had not been dropped, forcing the Japanese to surrender, World War II would have continued in a Vietnam-like way with continual loss of thousands of lives, both American and Japanese.

Thousands of brave men and women have made the supreme sacrifice for our freedom. I hope Fr. Cushing remembered them in his prayers while

he was busy apologizing for the actions that the American president and his advisers took to halt to the World War II bloodshed that the Japanese government instigated.

JANICE HUTTON INMAN
Avon, Ind.

■ I wonder if Fr. Cushing's Augusta pastor and Bishop Boland were aware that Pope John Paul II also went to Japan, where he said, "To remember Hiroshima is to commit oneself to peace."

Fr. Cushing had the audacity to use the parish pulpit to speak about his pilgrimage during liturgies that are rife with pleas for peace. The bishop of Savannah told the priest that he had no right "to push your agenda" by lamenting the dropping of bombs that destroyed more humans in a few moments than all the Americans killed in Korea and Vietnam put together. If it is a no-no for a preacher to voice regret for the horrors of nuclear weapons that can doom us all to extinction, just what part of Catholic social teaching can pass the test of orthodoxy on Sunday mornings?

NICHOLAS J. CARROLL
Crofton, Md.

Middle-class woes

■ In these days of tax breaks for the wealthy and little or no help for the rest of us, the poor are getting poorer at a great rate and the middle class are struggling to keep from slipping down to that level.

Most families I know include two working parents, and even so are hard-pressed to feed and clothe themselves and their children, while hoping to put something aside toward their family's higher education. There are only two to four children in most of these families. And still the parents struggle with their finances, as well as with their efforts to share some time as a family. In many such cases the father and mother work different shifts so that one of them can be at home with the children while the other works. These are no longer the years of a choice of jobs with good salaries and good hours, and with strong unions to fight for better pay and working conditions or good health benefits, or for pensions that will truly be paid when the time comes.

If you haven't seen any of this happening, Brian Kantz ("What 'crisis' of the middle class?" *NCR*, July 1), take time to look out from your ivory tower — or walk out from your gated suburban community — to see the way that many who were middle-class working people are now living. Living in a home of their own, if they were fortunate enough to buy it before the "housing bubble" began to swell and prepare to burst.

AUDREY A. FATOOH
Sonora, Calif.

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PRINCIPAL

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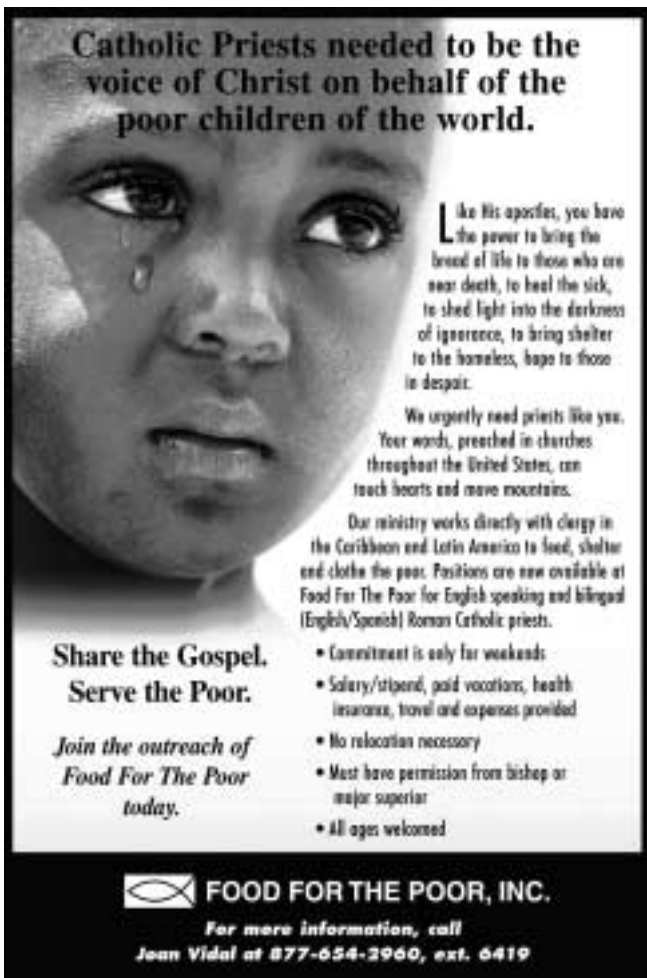
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Bankruptcy: the gamble that backfired

Words matter. More for a church than for other institutions because religion purports to be about truth. These truths, especially in the Catholic church, are largely conveyed through words — scripture, pastoral letters, encyclicals, books, homilies, even newspapers.

And, of late, in court documents.

In the two-plus decades we have reported and commented on the clergy sex abuse scandal, we have witnessed church leaders torture the language to avoid accountability.

"Mistakes were made," say some bishops, wary of attaching a personal pronoun to the criminal behavior of church officials who transferred child molesters from one kid-rich environment to another.

"We treated the problem as a sin, not a crime," say other church leaders, as if the two are mutually exclusive.

"We relied too heavily on the therapeutic community," say some bishops, which may be true but is hardly exculpatory.

Most famously, perhaps, was then-Bridgeport, Conn., Archbishop Edward Egan's 1997 testimony that the priests of the diocese were not employed by the church, and therefore answerable to him, but were instead "independent contractors." Egan subsequently became the cardinal archbishop of New York.

On the other side of the country, the language is as tortured in the bankruptcy proceedings of the dioceses of Spokane, Wash., and Portland, Ore. There, the

church's high-priced legal teams designed a too-clever-by-half, two-pronged strategy: First, forestall civil litigation against the church (and define its parameters) by voluntarily seeking the protection of federal bankruptcy courts and next, limit potential payments to creditors by shrinking the size of the pot established to pay off claimants.

The first aspect of the plan worked. Those who had a potential claim on diocesan funds stepped forward and have been counted.

On Aug. 26 in Spokane, the second part of the strategy — limit the scope of the assets available to claimants — failed. It did so because it is built on an assertion that any Catholic would recognize as false.

The Spokane diocese argued that the bishop has virtually no control over the parishes in his dominion. Therefore, those with claims against the diocese would have to settle for some percentage of the funds and the proceeds of sold property directly controlled by the chancery.

The diocese's argument flew in the face of state law, under which the bishop is the "corporation sole," the man who by virtue of his office "owns" the real estate and assets of the church in Spokane. Previously, in unrelated court proceedings, the diocese argued precisely that point: that the bishop was the "owner" of parish property. (Historically, the church supported the "corporation sole" provisions of civil law — a centralized approach to governance — as a reaction against potentially unruly lay parish trustees.) The

diocese, implied Judge Patricia Williams, was "talking out of both sides of its mouth." She ruled that all the assets of the church — its schools and social service centers, hospitals, retreat houses and parishes — must be considered in play.

The diocese also argued that the court should accept its interpretation of canon law as a basis for limiting the pot. Church law, said the diocese, sees parishes as "juridic persons" unto themselves. To even question that argument, said the diocese, was to trample on the church's religious freedom.

To which Williams said: Canon law has no standing in a civil bankruptcy proceeding. If the church wanted to avoid an adverse ruling on the point, it should never have voluntarily filed for bankruptcy.

A similar narrative is about to unfold in Portland, where the diocese will make almost identical claims to those made by Spokane.

The arguments made by the dioceses of Spokane and Portland bring to mind Marx's (Groucho's not Karl's) famous question: "Are you going to believe me or your own eyes?" The niceties of canon law aside, power in the U.S. church, ownership if you will, clearly resides with individual bishops in their dioceses. That power is wielded benignly by some, less so by many, but it is disingenuous to say that it doesn't exist. Bishops answer to Rome and, presumably, to God, but not to their pastors and certainly not to the people in the pews.

It is a bankrupt church in more ways than one.

Katrina exposes some deep U.S. vulnerabilities

By press time, the question of the beginning of the week about how damaging Hurricane Katrina might be had mutated hideously into the unthinkable: Can New Orleans be saved?

Disasters always bare vulnerabilities, but this was of a magnitude far beyond our experience. American cities do not stop functioning and teeter on disappearing because of natural disasters, not in the modern era. We are not used to thousands of wandering refugees looking for safety and food in our land. Bodies floating in streets days after a disaster hits, with public officials stymied by the enormity of a tragedy, are the elements of troubles in the developing world, not in the world's richest and most powerful country.

Perhaps the most disturbing display of vulnerability was the national leadership vacuum. Ample note already has been made in other publications of the tardiness and shallowness of President Bush's response to the devastation in Louisiana and Mississippi. His words, when they finally arrived, were like those of a local Chamber of Commerce official lamely assuring listeners that all would be well. They seemed to come from a leader in deep denial about the dimensions of stress felt in a country increasingly trying to make sense of two open-ended wars, economic uncertainty, growing ranks of poor people and now one of the worst natural disasters in our history.

If the disconnect between the Bush administration and the growing concerns of the populace had a noise level, it would be approaching sonic boom.

The effects of conducting presidential business in a sealed environment — where audiences are handpicked gatherings of supporters only — are evident in language that is unable to make even the slightest visceral connection with a besieged population. It is evident in the lack of mention of the horrible deaths of some 1,000 people, mostly women and children, trampled in a stampede during a religious observance in northern Baghdad, Iraq.

Mr. Bush may be confident that all will be well in the end, but America is increasingly viewing such breezy optimism, about matters here and abroad, as groundless.

Americans, as always, will respond. There will be restoration. And generosity beyond measure. When that is spent, however, the same Americans will be left wondering about what larger sense of purpose is to be served, at home and in the world community.

Benedict XVI and the Lefebverites

Pope Benedict XVI's agreement to meet with leaders of the schismatic movement of the late Bishop Marcel Lefebvre is an admirable gesture toward reconciliation, particularly in light of the venom that Lefebvre and his followers have aimed at popes, current and past, and at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

Benedict is correct, however, to proceed slowly and with great caution. The breakaway Society of St. Pius X, which was founded by Lefebvre 35 years ago, says it has always considered itself "attached and always will be, to the Holy See, eternal Rome."

Whatever the group might mean, its actions and those of its founder have made their position clear: They alone possess the truth and that truth brings with it an unqualified condemnation of the Second Vatican Council and all of its reforms — from the council's groundbreaking declarations on ecumenism, to liturgy, to the place of the church in the world.

The Lefebverites have come to symbolize a destructive force within the Catholic community: a minority whose pull against the gathered wisdom of all the world's bishops under two popes has terribly skewed what should have been the trajectory of reform following the council.

The further the Lefebverites went — and they went far beyond the pale — the more room other radical conservatives had to push against the council and its impulses without breaking communion with Rome. Those who resisted the fundamental rationale for the council were made bolder in the atmosphere of disdain for the council's initiatives that was fomented by the St. Pius X Society. The dissenters from the will of the assembled bishops of the world were able to focus on the inevitable flaws that showed up in implementation of the Vatican II documents in the years immediately following the council. They magnified them beyond reason, creating for themselves a platform for advocating a rollback of the reforms.

Certain solace might be taken in the fact that Vatican II's influence on relations with other Christian denominations and other faiths seems irreversible. While relationships with individu-

al groups may face setbacks and difficulties, no one can credibly suggest that Catholics revert to preconconciliar positions, for instance, about Protestants and Jews.

Laity will never revert to their preconconciliar status. Even those on the right who most ardently advocate a return to the past enjoy a visibility and influence that would have been unavailable to them prior to the reforms.

At the same time, there are some who seem to be succeeding in drawing anew the divisions between lay and ordained. Old fashions in both clothing and liturgical style that augment a growing clericalism have begun to creep back into worship services. Certainly some of this reaction is the natural backlash in an institution that, so deeply steeped in tradition, attempts to update itself.

Still, Benedict XVI, who has already gone an extra several miles in accommodating the breakaway group, should insist that any reconciliation with the Lefebverites not come at further diminishment of conciliar reforms.

In that vein the comments of Cardinal Francesco Pompedda, former prefect of the Apostolic Signatura, are encouraging. Pompedda, as reported in John Allen's online column, said that reconciliation could be achieved only "if the Society of St. Pius X submits itself to the legitimate authority of the pope." The problem, he said, was not the Latin Mass but the fact that the society was founded upon "an attitude of condemnation of the Second Vatican Council." That places the burden where it belongs, with those who would have the church undo the Second Vatican Council.

Last Words

"'I got it, Arthur!' the photographer shouted into the phone. 'I got it. I had to go to Communion five times, but I got it.'"

—Arthur Jones, Page 7