A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

Commonweal

MARCH 22, 2013

NOW WHAT?

THE RESIGNATION, THE CONCLAVE & THE FUTURE OF THE PAPACY

PETER JEFFERY • JOHN WILSON • MARY BOYS
WILLIAM PORTIER • RICHARD GAILLARDETZ

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Commonweal

MARCH 22, 2013 • VOLUME 140 • NUMBER 6

SHORT TAKES

ARTICLE

CNS PHOTO / POOL VIA REUTERS

Pope Benedict XVI attends a concert in Milan, June 1, 2012.

UPFRONT

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SCREEN

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POETRY

THE LAST WORD

Founded in 1924
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Subscription Information
212-662-4200

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Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] *A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*, is published twenty times a year by Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. E-mail: editors@commonwealmagazine.org. Toll-free: 888-495-6755. Fax: (212) 662-4183. Advertising correspondence should be sent to Regan Pickett. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Commonweal*, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-9982.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, OH 44691. *Commonweal* articles are also available at many libraries and research facilities on CD-ROM and in electronic databases. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional offices. Single Copy, $3.95. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $59; Canada, $64; foreign, $69. Special two-year rate: U.S. $89; Canada, $94; foreign, $109. Annual rates for air-mail delivery outside U.S.: Western Hemisphere, $86; Europe, $91; other parts of the world, $101. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

Cover design: Cecilia Guerrero Rezes
Cover image: CNS photo by Nancy Wiechec

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LETTERS

Papal retirement, celibacy, annulment, etc.

BENEDICT IN RETIREMENT

After the shock of the pope's surprise resignation I was initially inclined, like Joseph A. Komonchak ("Benedict's Act of Humility," March 8) and Peter Steinfels ("Shock Therapy," March 8), to see it as an act of humility in the service of the church, contributing, intentionally or not, to a much-needed demystification of the papacy. It is not difficult, however, to imagine very different consequences from those the pope himself apparently envisions. Without questioning Benedict's sincerity in resolving to abjure a public role in the future life of the church, I would be less apprehensive if he had chosen to live out his years in a quiet Bavarian monastery rather than in the apartment apparently being prepared for him in the heart of the Vatican. Even at this early stage it is impossible not to envision him being importuned to make his views known on the various conflicts sure to arise. It will take, I should think, the resolve of a saint for a person of his obvious abilities and deep concern for the future of the church to remain impervious to such pressures.

JOSEPH L. WALSH
Margate, N.J.

BETTER THAN BURNING

One fantasy Peter Steinfels did not entertain in "Shock Therapy" was that of ending the centuries-old mandate for clerical celibacy. The practice is a result of Pope Gregory VII's denunciation of simony and nepotism during the synod of 1074. His inspiration may well have been St. Paul's suggestion (1 Cor 7:8) that all Christians should remain celibate, but his practical motivation was purely economic. He simply did not want clerics to create dynasties by lavishing ecclesiastical offices and investitures on their relatives and progeny. Given that, in the very next verse (1 Cor 7:9), St. Paul exhorts his disciples to "marry rather than burn with passion," it seems that much priestly temptation might be turned away were clerics permitted to marry.

MICHAEL PATRICK KING
Web comment

NOT JUST PRETENDING

Thank you to Lloyd I. Sederer for his personal, balanced, and sympathetic description of the annulment process ("Null & Void?" February 22). I want to clarify one point. Annulment does not negate the experience, pain, or love of a failed marriage; it declares that the sacrament did not take place. Consequently, annulment does not "pretend" that a marriage did not happen; it declares that a couple did not bring all that was needed to that moment of commitment for a sacrament to take root in their lives. I am grateful for the church's annulment ministry. It helped me see myself and my former relationship in a new and at times painful light. It gave me the courage to love again and the freedom to claim the graces of the sacrament once again.

DONALD R. McCRABB
Washington, D.C.

OUR OTHER ANCESTORS

Donald Senior's review of Jon D. Levenson's *Inheriting Abraham* ("Our Father," February 22) traces the problems Levenson identifies in calling Abraham the common father of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, given that the figure of Abraham evokes multiple meanings for each faith. Senior mentions other possible shared roots: *Nostra aetate* finds common ground in the creation; Levenson suggests Adam and Eve as an alternative; and Jewish tradition considers the Noahide Covenant to be our common bond.

I suggest one more: the Pharisees. They were the progenitors of Rabbinic Judaism, and their beliefs color Judaism, Christianity, and Islam more than we care to admit. Belief in the hereafter, resurrection of the dead, teachings about the messiah, concepts of God and prayer, the post-biblical stories we Jews call midrash that found their way into the Qur'an—all these and more can be traced to the Pharisees. Dare we say that the Pharisees are our common ancestor?

ANSON LAYTNER
Seattle, Wash.

From the Editors

A Right, Not a Gift

The months leading up to the 2012 election saw a wave of attempts by Republican state legislators to suppress turnout among likely Democratic voters. A number of those attempts were halted as violations of the 1965 Voting Rights Act under Section 5, which requires certain (mostly Southern) states and jurisdictions to obtain preapproval from the Department of Justice before making changes to election procedures. In Florida, for example, restrictions on early voting were blocked in the five counties covered by Section 5 as likely to discourage turnout among minorities. In the rest of the state, those restrictions led to an embarrassing national spectacle, as people waited in line for hours at polling stations. President Barack Obama referred to Florida's problems and the rise in election manipulation in his State of the Union address. The right to vote is "one of the most fundamental rights of a democracy," he said. "When any American…[is] denied that right because they can't afford to wait for five or six or seven hours just to cast their ballot, we are betraying our ideals."

The Voting Rights Act's preclearance requirement and the formula that determines which states and counties it covers was renewed by Congress in 2006, along with the rest of the VRA, for another twenty-five years (with a required review after fifteen years). The Supreme Court now seems likely to overturn that extension. Oral arguments on February 27 focused on whether, given that the oversight mandated by Section 5 is a dramatic intrusion into the sovereignty of the affected states, Congress should have felt obliged to update the formula for inclusion or else drop the preclearance requirement entirely. Instead, after gathering evidence on the state of voting rights in the affected areas, Congress voted overwhelmingly to renew Section 5 as it stood. After debacles like the one in Florida, this would seem a strange moment to question the need for such oversight—but the irregularities of the 2012 election season never came up in the Court's discussion.

Section 5 is certainly imperfect; a careful examination of recent data and trends would likely remove some jurisdictions from its oversight and add others. Senators John Cornyn (R-Tex.) and Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), both of whom voted for the 2006 renewal, complained in writing afterward that "the final product is not the best product we might have produced had we engaged in a more thorough debate about possible improvements." Still, they conceded, it was "the very best that we can do under the circumstances."

Those circumstances, as imagined by Justice Antonin Scalia, are what may doom Section 5, and with it the VRA's primary power to block voter-suppression schemes. Scalia shocked observers by proposing that Congress's deliberations and near-unanimous vote in 2006 ought to be dismissed because of the irresistible force of "racial entitlements." In certain situations, Scalia seemed to argue, "normal political processes" are insufficient and thus illegitimate: "this is not the kind of a question you can leave to Congress."

In fact, the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution specifically grants Congress the ability to pass "appropriate legislation" to ensure that voting rights are not "denied or abridged" in any state. A conservative judge dedicated to the principle of judicial restraint might be expected to defer to the legislative branch in its exercise of powers explicitly granted to it by the Constitution. But Scalia and his fellow Republican-appointed justices seem inclined, in this case, toward clear judicial activism, overturning what U.S. Solicitor General Donald Verrilli called "a cautious choice" by Congress "to maintain the deterrent and constraining effect of Section 5."

It is important to note that the VRA includes provisions for "bailing out" of oversight—if a jurisdiction covered under Section 5 can demonstrate that it has not engaged in discriminatory practices in the past ten years—and for adding new jurisdictions to the preclearance requirement. Shelby County, Alabama, which brought the suit now before the Supreme Court, could in theory apply to bail out. In practice, however, it cannot, because in 2006 a city there was found to have redistricted a black councilman out of his seat. "You may be the wrong party bringing this," Justice Sonia Sotomayor told Shelby County's lawyer. "Why would we vote in favor of a county whose record is the epitome of what caused the passage of this law to start with?"

Scalia's offhand reference to the "perpetuation of racial entitlement" was another startling reminder of why the VRA is necessary. The federal government goes to great lengths to ensure equal representation not as a generous gift to racial minorities, but because the right of all to vote and be counted is fundamental to our political system. There are legitimate reasons to question Congress's decision in 2006. But thanks to Scalia, a decision to overturn Section 5 will help validate the claim that important mechanisms meant to protect rights are simply "entitlements" whenever they benefit minorities. ■

March 5, 2013

John Garvey

Letting Go

WHY BENEDICT'S RESIGNATION MATTERS

Pope Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Square, February 27, 2013

Several Orthodox friends have asked what I think of Pope Benedict XVI's resignation. A few are, like me, former Roman Catholics. When I mentioned Joseph A. Komonchak's comment in *Commonweal* ("Benedict's Act of Humility," March 8) that the pope's resignation brought the papacy back into the church, they were very sympathetic. They were also sympathetic to Benedict himself, noting—as so many have—that his decision must have been brought on partly by his experience of watching John Paul II's slow decline, and the disorder that swirled around it.

There are rumors of secret reports, gay Vatican cabals, blackmail related to sex-scandal cover-ups. Any or all of this may be part of the real story. But respect for Benedict—earned, I think, by the quality and compassionate nature of his thought and the not unimportant fact that he was the one who forced Marcial Maciel Degollado, the founder of the Legionaries of Christ, to step down after John Paul had refused to do so—makes me believe that Benedict's reasons for resigning were for the good of the church. He may have been too much of a company man all his life, and he has this in common with almost all bishops. Courage and moral integrity haven't been major parts of the bishop's job description. But when Benedict could finally take action against Maciel, he did. And he tried to reach out to victims of some of the bad policies he had helped keep in place as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This is not nothing. It is also hardly heroic.

But heroism isn't the point. The humility of his decision to give up power is, and this really does matter. It will affect future papacies, all to the good. There is something of *kenosis* in giving up any power you could hold on to, and God bless Benedict for doing this. I hope it spells the beginning of a rethinking of the nature of papal power. Lord Acton went to Rome during the First Vatican Council to lobby against the idea of papal infallibility, and his oft-quoted line "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" was a reference to the papacy. I believe Benedict's resignation was a genuinely selfless act, done for the good of all.

When I say "the good of all," I mean to include those of us who are not Roman Catholics. It could seem that we aren't involved in this, but I remember something an Orthodox monk said to me years ago: "We should pray for the strength of the Catholic Church. Without them we look pretty silly." What he meant, I think, was that the Catholic Church, like the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Church of the East (they don't like to be called Nestorians), goes back in an unbroken way to apostolic times, and shares a set of beliefs and assumptions about the world that are challenged in our time. As the largest of the ancient apostolic churches and the one with the most visible and vocal presence in the West, Roman Catholicism has a vital role in presenting a vision of the world that is sacramental. When it gets it right, the Catholic Church can show ancient tradition to be a living thing. Jaroslav Pelikan famously wrote, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living." The Catholic Worker movement and the Little Brothers of Jesus, to name only two examples, show the life, and life-giving nature, of Catholicism in striking ways. Within Orthodoxy, people like Mother Maria Skobtsova (who died in a Nazi concentration camp, where she was sent for aiding Jews) and the Lourmel community she founded in Paris and saints like Silouan of Mt. Athos offer a similar living vision.

While Benedict's successor certainly should clean house and force the resignation of many bishops, and while I can think of many reforms that would perhaps be helpful (the restoration of the female diaconate and a larger place for women in the church, the ordination of married men, more genuine conciliarity and collegiality among bishops), the great problem is that even these unlikely reforms would probably change little. The Catholic Church and all churches face the fact that we live in a world that is not so much hostile to traditional religion as completely indifferent to it. The church fills a need the world doesn't think it has. It answers questions no one is asking.

I have met some genuinely holy people, and they make all the difference. They lead people to question themselves and the direction of their lives. It is the manifestation of holiness that we need. Bishops, from the pope on down, have had little to do with this, and, by confusing holiness with morality (primarily the sexual kind), the hierarchy has muddied the waters.

We need the courage to try to pray without ceasing, as Paul counsels. We need saints. ■

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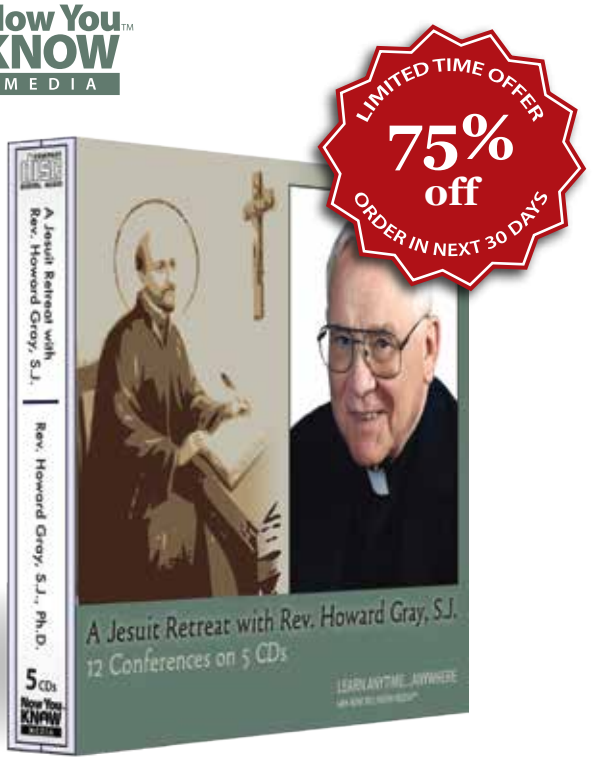

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Daniel K. Finn

Gamed

WHAT WALL STREET HAS IN COMMON WITH THE OLYMPICS

Badminton doesn't usually garner much attention at the Olympics, but it did this past summer, when millions across the globe watched the curious spectacle of world-class players purposefully hitting shots long or into the net in order to lose a match and—through a structural quirk of the competition—thereby set themselves up for an easier draw in the next round. Boos from the crowd ensued, along with disqualifications from the games, and a myriad of op-ed pieces debating the character of true sportsmanship.

My initial reaction was surprise that badminton authorities would have been so foolish as to structure the pairings in Olympic play in a way that might encourage a team to lose. But it turns out that the same system is widely employed in international competition in many sports. It usually works well, but it didn't this time. This was largely because in one of the four groups of four teams to play a round-robin first round, the world-champion Chinese team was upset by Denmark. Both teams were proceeding to round two—each grouping passes its top two teams onward in the tourney—but now with Denmark seeded higher. Teams in other groups still playing in round one knew that it would be easier to play Denmark than China in round two. Thus, the offenders concluded they'd be better off losing their final match in round one so they'd rank second in their group and, through the reverse-seed matching, get to play Denmark instead of China in the subsequent round.

The offending teams were evicted from the Olympics for "not using one's best efforts to win a match" and "conducting oneself in a manner that is clearly abusive or detrimental to the sport." In particular, many editorial writers decried the loss of sportsmanship and the demise of a commitment to excellence independent of personal gain. But other pundits argued, as one headline put it, that "the goal is to win a gold medal, not to win every game." After all, Bobby Fischer sometimes sacrificed a pawn for a later advantage. Derek Jeter might lay down a sacrifice bunt to move a runner from first base to second. Weren't the badminton players simply doing the same—sacrificing an immediate gain in order to improve their chance for ultimate victory? And what about the two teams with the worst records in the NFL, who on the last weekend of the season recognize that one more loss might actually improve their team next year, since finishing last gives them the first pick in the college draft? Does any fan doubt—especially in a year when that top draft pick is a potential superstar—that the team in question may well approach the game with diminished zeal?

There are serious questions here—not just about the nature of sport, but about the character of a moral life. Debates

about law and morality are ancient. Since we Christians live in a pluralistic society with people who don't share our commitments—and since we ourselves are sinners—prudence requires that we shape our institutions so that they support morality by reducing as much as possible the conflict between virtue and self-interest. The key here lies in building structures that channel self-interest toward the common good.

To this end, Major League Baseball doesn't count Derek Jeter's sacrifice bunt against his batting average. As for the badminton scandal, it could have been avoided if those offending players hadn't known which of the other three groups they would be paired with in round two. How about making those pairings only *after* round one is finished, with a five-year-old child pulling a slip of paper out of a box? (After all, that's how Coptic Christians choose their pope from the final three candidates.)

At our best, we keep the goals of playing a game subordinated to the goals that rightly lead us to *choose to play* the game in the first place—what Thomas Aquinas would call preserving the proper ordering of human goods. But athletes, like the rest of us, can easily become so focused on the former that they lose sight of the latter. And herein lies a connection to economic life. In the current era all too many investment bankers, for example, have come to believe that success is measured by their personal incomes, not by how the financial services they provide contribute to the

commonweal. We need economic structures that channel self-interest toward the common good while engendering initiative, innovation, and productivity.

Many such structures (and the cultural meanings that underpin them) are produced not by government, but by persons in a wide variety of organizations in society, including trade associations that adopt codes of conduct and police themselves accordingly—and the importance of such efforts informs Pope Benedict's warning against "the continuing hegemony of the binary model of market-plus-state" (*Caritas in veritate*). Nonetheless, Catholic social thought has always recognized that government also has an essential role to play. Political conservatives who excoriate "government intervention" in the economy miss this point. Every "game" in life needs rules in order to obviate abusive actions, whether in badminton or business, baseball or bookkeeping. In this regard government does not "intervene" in markets; government *defines* markets, by creating their rules.

Yes, governments must resist over-regulation. But political resistance to rules solely on the grounds that they'll make it harder for firms to do business isn't simply wrong; it's a category mistake. Only a concern for the common good—which of course includes the well-being of businesses—can justify changing the rules. This conviction led Pope John Paul II to teach that the market should be "appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the state, so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied" (*Centesimus annus*).

We live in an era when many Americans rail against government. But in a democracy, government is self-government. So what, and whom, are we railing against? And to what end? As the Lutheran bishop Peter Rogness has put it, political discourse that demonizes government "is like an immune system run amuck that eats the very body in which it resides." This loss of the sense of democratic self-government lies at the heart of the Supreme Court's misguided *Citizens United* decision. By fiat, the Court expanded the claim—itself a creature of nineteenth-century jurisprudential activism—that each corporation is a person. Will self-government be drowned in the flood of political expenditure by firms that pay twice as much for a thirty-second Super Bowl commercial as the total re-election budget spent by the average congressional candidate? Thanks in part to *Citizens United*, it is an open question in this nation today.

Whether in badminton or economic life, we need three things: excellent play, rules that channel self-interest toward the well-being of all involved, and procedures for changing those rules that prioritize the common good. As every Olympic athlete understands, playing well isn't easy. Achieving the other two goals is even more difficult. ■

Daniel K. Finn *is professor of theology and Clemens Professor of Economics at St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict. His books include* The Moral Dynamics of Economic Life: An Extension and Critique of *Caritas in veritate (Oxford).*

Nathan Pippenger

Common Ground?

CLOSING THE IMMIGRATION DIVIDE

It was unthinkable, only three short months ago, that Washington's long-estranged lawmakers would suddenly find themselves entranced by feel-good bipartisanship, especially on an issue as divisive as immigration. And yet here we are: A bipartisan reform proposal has emerged from the Senate's "Gang of Eight," followed by a receptive speech in Nevada by the president, followed by qualified praise—from no less a right-wing enforcer than Rush Limbaugh—for the reformist overtures of Florida's Republican Sen. Marco Rubio. The unthinkable now seems possible.

It's important not to overstate that judgment; reformers still have a minefield to navigate. But their effort has come surprisingly far, surprisingly fast, and we should hope the progress continues. The nation's current immigration regime is a dysfunctional and often cruel system that imposes huge economic and humanitarian costs on citizens and noncitizens alike, with few justifying policy benefits. In other words: It is entirely possible to overhaul our current system without endangering its legitimate goals. So why hasn't anything been done to fix it?

Much of the answer lies in a common misreading of lessons from the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. That law granted amnesty to nearly three million undocumented immigrants, in exchange for beefed-up border security and penalties on businesses that hired undocumented workers. The approach mirrored the logic of today's reform push: Normalize the status of immigrants already here, and staunch the flow of illegal entries through economic and security measures. But while the amnesty was carried out, lawmakers mostly gutted the employer penalties in order to secure the support of big business—and, to compound matters, spending on border security remained measly for years. With weak penalties and insufficient funding, the number of illegal entries simply kept rising. Conservatives felt burned: having agreed to swap amnesty in exchange for a real halt in illegal crossings, they ended up with amnesty and more illegal crossings. They vowed never to repeat their mistake.

The bitter memories of 1986 were evident in Rush Limbaugh's wary questioning of Rubio after the Senate group released its plan. Arguing that a "reluctant" President Reagan had granted amnesty "because he was promised border security," Limbaugh complained that "the border security never happened. And the same language is being used today as was used in 1986." Rubio concurred, assuring Limbaugh that if "this bill does not have real triggers in there, if there is not language in this bill that guarantees that nothing else

Mexican-American border at Nogales

will happen unless these enforcement mechanisms are in place, I won't support it."

This was an important exchange, because it signaled the right's most likely escape hatch if this recent bipartisan comity turns sour. Solving America's immigration problem requires a path to citizenship, which is a hard sell to millions of people who feel, with some justification, that rule-breaking ought not to be rewarded. The only way for conservatives to swallow that pill is to insist on tougher border security—and even then, differing views on what constitutes "security" could doom an agreement.

Yes, the southwestern border should be secured, but the truth is that it is more secure today than ever before—and ignorance of that fact should not be used as an excuse to block reform. In recent years, the government has added thousands of new border agents (nearly doubling the total since 2006), hundreds of miles of border fencing, and hundreds of camera towers. It has expanded its fleet of high-tech vehicles, including trucks fitted with infrared cameras and radar systems, planes, helicopters, and even unmanned surveillance drones. Meanwhile, as living standards rise and birthrates fall in Mexico, steadily fewer people are attempting entry into the United States. Combined with a massive increase in deportations under President Obama, the result has been, incredibly, a halt—and possibly a reversal—of net migration from Mexico. That's right: More people are leaving for Mexico than are coming from it.

The push for reform, then, should focus on the undocumented population now living in the United States. We lack the knowledge, the resources, and—thankfully—the stomach to identify, round up, and deport 11 million people, many of whom have lived here for decades and have built families that include U.S. citizens. Nearly 17 million people now live in families of "mixed" status—some members here legally, others not.

To ignore these deep roots is to skirt the real humanitarian issue at stake. Yes, there must be penalties for illegal entry, and major reform proposals include fines, payment of back taxes, mandatory civics classes, and waiting periods for legalization so that undocumented workers don't cut in line ahead of law-abiding immigrants. But the path to legalization must not be derailed by cries of amnesty and Pharisaic theorizing about moral hazard. President Obama's remarks in Nevada captured the tension well: "Yes," he acknowledged, "they broke the rules.... But these 11 million men and women are now here.... They're woven into the fabric of our lives."

Still, there is a bitter irony in the president's words. Obama's first-term handling of immigration policy was marred not only by political miscalculations, but also by a discouraging moral cowardice. In his quest to appear tough before immigration hawks, he often ignored the ways in which the undocumented are, as he put it, "woven into the fabric of our lives." His administration deported undocumented immigrants in record-breaking numbers—a

NATHAN PITCHFORD

I. Easter Monday

Mon chef majeur? He is the Holy Ghost,
and Nathan asks, "Have you been born again?"
Perhaps not. I have faith in Christ. Amen
I say to you He comes when I am toast
browned on a grill, beside me shredded dove
tossed with the pasta, egg yolks beaten fine
with a wire whisk, a whisper of white wine
and then we garnish with a prayer for love
and Kalamata olives. I am Greek
from way back and invite my friends to dine
however politics or fates incline.
Thrust from the garden, we were made to seek
provender. God told Peter: "Kill and eat."
Temptation: lambs gambol on cloven feet.

II. Journeyman

A year, missionary in Kazakhstan,
a great place for a boy to learn God's plan
    set forth in Ten Commandments
    or Madison's Amendments
to the best rules ever devised for man
    since coal spilled from a hod
    burned for the love of God,
and venison browned in a frying pan.

III. Homecoming

My guest first earned his spurs not far from Pinedale
and spent most of his teenage years on horseback
roaming the wilds, the Wind River Mountains,
his Bible Camp not many miles from Cora,
and followed me up the Green River Valley
to find my fire ring stone cold under Square Top.

I pray the Bible will become his bass note,
the drone string on a gypsy's hurdy-gurdy
above which treble strings ring like the angel's
who harped with David in his ancient city
and now stands guard over a poet's children.
Aged four and eight, let them have saddled ponies.

—Timothy Murphy

Timothy Murphy's newest books are Mortal Stakes and Faint Thunder *and* Hunter's Log*, both from the Dakota Institute Press.*

costly way to convince his opponents that he wasn't soft on lawbreakers. This toughness utterly failed to win him any political goodwill. The current push for reform is taking place because of Republicans' disastrous performance among Latinos last November, not because Obama's opponents only recently became aware of what he's been up to for the past four years. If the president's electoral performance among Latinos hadn't been so dominant, there would be no push for reform today.

Worse, the deportations undermined an important policy to which the administration demonstrated only sporadic commitment: prioritizing enforcement to focus on criminals, not elderly grandparents, young students, or parents and spouses of U.S. citizens. That policy of "prosecutorial discretion" was regularly ignored. Authorities pursued the deportation of a man who had been targeted by a murderous gang in his home country and was caring for his dying mother, a U.S. citizen's mother who was a refugee from Guatemala's civil war, and a community of Indonesian Christians who settled in New Jersey after fleeing religious violence. Officials in these cases were unafraid to ignore the guidelines. Usually, they proved more receptive to the threat of bad publicity than professional sanction. A path to citizenship would do much to repair this badly broken system.

If that change happens, it will be a gift to a president whose performance on immigration, with a few welcome exceptions, has been ineffectual. To be fair, Obama made one critically important and long-overdue policy change during the campaign, providing temporary administrative relief for undocumented immigrants brought here as children. The White House's carefully timed measure, aided by Mitt Romney's antagonistic "self-deportation" rhetoric, helped Obama carry more than 70 percent of the Latino vote en route to easy reelection. Again, it is that number, more than anything the president has done, which may convince Republicans to support reform.

So far, though, that recognition of political self-interest has dawned on only one side of the Capitol. This is a reason for concern, since the biggest obstacles to reform were never in the Senate. Deep opposition remains among House Republicans, and if they choose to exploit worries—however overblown—about border security or "amnesty," their caucus may be able to block reform.

That would be a short-term victory for conservatives, but a long-term failure for the GOP and for President Obama, who may not get another chance to fix an area of policy he has mostly botched. A rare window of opportunity has opened. If it closes without any progress, American politics will quickly move on to the next big thing. But it will leave behind, and possibly for quite a long time, those millions who have been waiting years for relief. ■

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CNS PHOTO / *L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO* VIA REUTERS

Regime Change

Benedict & His Successor

Peter Jeffery, John Wilson, Mary C. Boys,
William L. Portier, Richard R. Gaillardetz

Peter Jeffery

It may be the last time a surprise is announced in Latin. But as soon as I heard about the pope's unexpected retirement, the conspiracy theories were not far behind. Was he bailing out one step ahead of a whole new scandal? Was this some sinister plot to appoint his own successor? Scarier still were reports that canon law requires a resigning pope to be of sound mind and acting freely. So a pope of unsound mind can't resign or be forced out? Then lightning struck St. Peter's.

Doubtless there have been medical issues we hadn't heard about, but I think it's obvious why Benedict XVI is retiring. It was he, as Cardinal Ratzinger, who labored to hold the Vatican together during the long, slow decline of John Paul II, so differently chronicled in Stanislaw Dziwisz's *Let Me Go to the Father's House* and John Cornwell's *The Pontiff in Winter*. Back then, rumors were rife about Vatican factions pushing pet causes and jockeying for advantage in the next papal election. It was said that John Paul had met with the archbishop of Canterbury without knowing who he was. It was rumored that a secret cabal of curial cardinals was planning to keep John Paul in a permanent vegetative state, so they could indefinitely issue encyclicals in his name—brain-dead but still infallible. There were jokes about John Paul's successor taking the name George Ringo, in a dramatic gesture to world youth. Even Ratzinger's election failed to stop it all: the secrets his butler got in trou-

ble for revealing were partly about people positioning their cronies for the conclave that is now upon us. Clearly our Holy Father was right to spare the church another long decline. Better to get out of the way so a younger pope can fully take charge.

But what sort of pope will we get? The American liberal media thinks it has already figured that one out. Coverage on CNN and the in *New York Times* tends to strike a note of pessimism: Don't get your hopes up for a pope who will endorse the Democratic Party's social platform—all the cardinal electors were appointed by the last two popes, and will surely continue the same old tired agendas. For once, the folks at Fox News hope the *Times* is right.

I don't believe that terms derived from politics, like "liberal" and "conservative," offer the best vocabulary for talking about tensions in the church. And I don't believe we can predict the new pope's policies on such issues as Vatican finances, women in the church, the pedophilia cover-up. Half the popes I lived through were surprises: John XXIII, John Paul I and II. When the man some people had called "God's Rottweiler" was elected Benedict XVI, lots of Catholics on both sides thought they could hear the knives being sharpened for a long-anticipated bloodbath. What we got instead was an encyclical called "God Is Love." I am eager to be surprised again.

Still there are some things I think we can safely predict about the next pope. First, he will probably be the first pope ordained as a priest in the Vatican II era. He won't remember the preconciliar church, and may not even know Latin. That, frankly, worries me. There's way too much amnesia already. Our disputes about liturgy, models of leadership, the church's role in society would be far less painful if the most vocal partisans on every side knew more history. We need a "hermeneutic of continuity" now more than ever before. You can't know who you are if you don't know who you were.

On the other hand, the new pope will have grown up in a church that has always wrestled with the challenges of ecumenism, modern culture, liturgical renewal, the vocation shortage. He will know that these things are not temporary detours on our way home to the golden age: they are where we live now, and where he has lived all along. I don't know what vision he will offer of where we need to go, but I am hopeful he will recognize that we need to do some regrouping and reshuffling to face our challenges head on.

The next pope will take office in the middle of the Year of Faith, which is dedicated to promoting the New Evangelization. Despite some reported wistfulness about a smaller and purer church, Pope Benedict recognizes that, by definition, no church-of-the-few could ever be the Catholic Church. Smaller and fewer is what we're getting, though, as historic European edifices empty out, ancient communities flee the Middle East, Latin America goes Pentecostal. Rather than accept this shrinkage with relief or resignation, the pope's response has been to call back the lost sheep with a New Evangelization.

What exactly is a "New Evangelization"? Probably the best guide would be the documents generated by the Synod of Bishops that opened the Year of Faith. Unfortunately the most important of them are available only in unofficial translations, since the official Latin texts are confidential. That is because the synod since its inception has had only "the function of providing information and offering advice" to the pope, who may or may not use the synod's report to compose an Apostolic Exhortation. Benedict himself, in the homily at the opening Eucharist, said the New Evangelization was aimed "principally at those who, though baptized, have drifted away from the church and live without reference to the Christian life." One could see this as an unrealistic, even reactionary desire to somehow reverse the recent history of formerly Catholic countries. But rather than giving him a political label, I would say Pope Benedict is the kind of Catholic who sees particularly clearly the immutable, transcendent Truth to which all of us need to conform ourselves—the Christ who, when lifted up, draws all people to himself. The Catholics who don't feel drawn to his kind of leadership tend to be those who see more clearly the immanent truth hidden in creation, the Spirit who blows like the wind, the Son of Man who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. The New Evangelization should draw these perspectives back together in a kind of binocular vision, revealing the one Truth as a unity of wholeness, not a unity of exclusion.

Indeed, the unofficial "Final List of Propositions" published on the Vatican website is no jeremiad about rescuing a sinking Europe. Inculturation is one of the first things they mention. Globalization is paired with secularism as "challenges of our time." The church should "welcome migrants and promote their human dignity," recognize the charisms and "dynamism of the new ecclesiastical movements and new communities," "be present in all fields of art." The bishops also recommend "greater attention to the church's social doctrine," rendering liturgical celebrations "relevant to the urban context" of city life, "changes in the dynamics of pastoral structures which no longer respond to the evangelical demands of the current time." "The preferential option for the poor" means that "they are both recipients and actors in the New Evangelization." And "the synod acknowledges that today, women (lay and religious) together with men contribute to theological reflection at all levels and share pastoral responsibilities in new ways."

One of the next pope's responsibilities will be to decide what to do with the synod's propositions; he could do a lot more than write another Apostolic Exhortation. And, given the challenges of evangelizing a world that is more interconnected and complicated than ever, he will need all the help he can get. We should take seriously what Benedict's resignation statement had to say about the burdens of being pope "in today's world."

This brings me to the last prediction I feel I can make

with certainty: The next pope won't be me. But, just for the sake of discussion, I'll tell you what I would do. The first thing I would do is deliver the traditional blessing of the crowd assembled in St. Peter's Square. The second thing I would do is announce the theme for the next Synod of Bishops. They are to begin discussing how to shape a transitional process for making the synod itself a more deliberative and legislative body, which will operate in union with the national episcopal conferences and St. Peter's successor. This would help fulfill the desire Pope Paul VI expressed in the synod's founding document, "for a continuance after the council of the great abundance of benefits that We have been so happy to see flow to the Christian people...as a result of Our close collaboration with the bishops." And it would confirm his observation that "This synod...like all human institutions, can be improved upon with the passing of time." John Paul's and Benedict's appointees do not all think alike, and the worldwide pastoral experience of all the bishops will be crucial in addressing every problem we face now. When the Spirit speaks to the church, we should listen with all ears.

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John Wilson

My mother was still very much herself when she turned eighty-five—in possession of her "faculties," as the characters in Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori* say. Within a few months, though, that began to change, and month by month dementia tightened its grip on her.

When I heard the news about Benedict, I was finishing a book by J. I. Packer (whom I greatly admire), *Puritan Portraits*. I had been reading about Richard Baxter and the "good death": the notion that, in dying, a faithful Christian should demonstrate the authenticity of his faith. I thought about my mother—who was ninety years old last December—and other faithful Christians I have known whose minds have been broken long before they died. God has promised that he will never abandon his children, and I believe him. But he has not promised us a "good death."

In stepping down from the papacy, Benedict acknowledged his frailty. He did not elaborate, and there was no need for him to do so—nor for us to speculate. The church he has served with great devotion will elect a new pope. As with his predecessor, John Paul II, there has been a tendency, both among Benedict's hagiographers and among the church's fiercest critics, to credit him with an influence far exceeding what he has done or could possibly have done. Benedict himself knows better.

From my standpoint as an evangelical Protestant who has gained much from the Catholic tradition, and from

Benedict in particular, I am baffled by the criticism of his decision from writers I respect (including, not least, my dear friend Jody Bottum in the *Weekly Standard*). The notion, for example, that the existence of a former pope (devoting himself to prayer and reflection) might well pose a serious threat to the administration of his successor sounds like something from *The Daily Show*.

Before long, of course, attention will shift from Benedict to the upcoming papal conclave. I have no idea who the next pope will be. He will inherit a terrible mess—and a powerful witness to the God who created the universe and sustains it, the God who promises the restoration of all things: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Roman Catholic Church is in desperate need of reform. So too the Orthodox Church, and evangelicalism, and what used to be called "the mainline," and Pentecostalism...and so it has always been, from the first century on.

I don't write that blithely, as if (for instance) the scandal of abuse perpetrated by priests and covered up by their superiors is to be waved away or somehow cancelled out by reference to the long history of egregious wrongdoing that all honest Christians must own up to. But if what we say when we join our voices in the Apostles' Creed is anything like the truth, there is a lot more to the story.

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Mary C. Boys

In early January a beloved friend of mine died. A serious student of Vatican II, she was a passionate advocate for women's voices in the church. The night I received word of her death, a phrase came to me in a dream: "strategic perseverance." When I awoke, those two words, which I had never before juxtaposed, stayed with me. I regard them as my friend's wise counsel, particularly with regard to living in the Roman Catholic Church today.

For my part I persevere in the Catholic tradition because that tradition is rich, deep, and broad; I am edified by its spirituality and sacramental life, including the witness of so many who walk the Way of Jesus. I persevere, because the Petrine ministry is vital for the unity of the church. Yet one must be strategic in dealing with a ministry exercised as an absolute monarchy governed exclusively by men—one moreover, that, in too often exercising its authority in a punitive manner, alienates those it judges. Strategic, because working in the interreligious realm and belonging to a woman's religious community in the United States today requires us to be, in the words of Matthew 10:6, "wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

That "strategic perseverance" has become my watchword offers a hint of my mixed feelings about Pope Benedict XVI. The promulgation of *Dominus Iesus* in 2000, when the future Benedict was the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, foreshadowed his complicated legacy in ecumenical and interreligious relations. Authoritarian in tone, that declaration surveyed the religious landscape from a position of omniscience. Subsequently, as pope, Benedict ignited controversy with a poorly articulated claim about Islam in a lecture at the University of Regensburg in September 2006. A month later, when thirty-eight Muslim religious authorities and scholars issued an "Open Letter to the Pope," Benedict showed openness to their response, and his visit to the Blue Mosque in Istanbul in November 2006 partly quelled the protest. On the first anniversary of the open letter, 138 Muslim religious leaders published *A Common Word between Us and You*, and the numerous conferences that followed in its wake have included Vatican involvement.

In the sphere of Catholic-Jewish relations, Benedict committed himself to honoring the remarkable legacy of his predecessor, indicating in an address in June 2005 his resolve to "continue on the path of improving relations" with Jews. Yet he has been less successful in striking the right dialogical tone. His May 2009 visit to Israel notably failed to escape the shadow of John Paul II's memorable visit there in 2003. Like John Paul before him, Benedict gave an address in the Hall of Remembrance at Yad Vashem, Israel's memorial to victims of the Holocaust—a speech that was dispassionate and detached, in stark contrast to his predecessor's personal, even visceral address.

More unsettling was Benedict's lack of candor with regard to the church's role in the Holocaust. In Israel, he spoke of the brutal extermination of Jews "by a godless regime that propagated an ideology of antisemitism and hatred." Such phrases—"the Nazi reign of terror," an "insane racist ideology, born of neo-paganism"—typify Benedict's characterization of the Holocaust. Rarely does he admit to any degree of ecclesial complicity; and when he does, he seriously understates it, via such contorted formulations as "it cannot be denied that a certain insufficient resistance to this atrocity on the part of Christians can be explained by the inherited anti-Judaism in the hearts of not a few Christians." The failure to grapple with disturbing truths about the church in relation to the Holocaust, together with his pursuing the canonization of Pope Pius XII, suggest a reluctance to gaze into the tarnished mirror of history.

Benedict's patient pursuit of reconciliation with the Society of St. Pius X and other traditionalist groups has also complicated relations with Jews—most notoriously in his removal of the ban of excommunication from the Lefebvrist Bishop Richard Williamson, whose denial of the Holocaust (and misogynistic social views) were apparently unknown to the pope. More consequential was the prayer for Jews Benedict composed for the Good Friday liturgy in the Tridentine Rite. Released in February 2008 under the title "*Pro Conversione Iudaeorum*," it petitioned Jews to acknowledge Jesus as the savior of all. Given the church's long history of denigrating Judaism, particularly

A flash of lightning over St. Peter's Basilica on February 11, 2013

CNS PHOTO / ANSA / ALESSANDRO DI MEO VIA REUTERS

the Good Friday prayer for the "perfidious" Jews from the Roman Missal of 1570 that prevailed until 1960, the pope's formulation was seen as contentious. Cardinal Walter Kasper, then President of the Pontifical Council for Religious Relations with the Jews, intervened in the ensuing controversy to argue for an eschatological interpretation. While Kasper's intervention alleviated some of the tension, the reality remains that the Catholic Church now sanctions two versions—the 1970 prayer in the Roman Missal and the pope's composition for the Tridentine Rite—that are at theological odds.

If Benedict's papacy is ambiguous in its relations with Jews, its treatment of American women's religious congregations reflects a more coherent—and hostile—posture. Two investigations were initiated under Benedict's watch: the "Apostolic Visitation" of religious institutes in the United States, launched in 2008 under the auspices of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life with the stated purpose of assessing the "quality of life" in these congregations; and the doctrinal assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The result of the visitation, although completed in January 2012, has yet to be announced. The outcome of the doctrinal assessment, meanwhile, was announced last April. In it the CDF accused the LCWR of advocating "radical theses incompatible with the Catholic faith," and of advocating for economic justice, while insufficiently supporting magisterial teaching against homosexuality and abortion. The CDF appointed Seattle Archbishop J. Peter Sartain to supervise changes in the LCWR's statutes, programs, and affiliations in order to align them more closely with the church's "teachings and discipline."

Personally, I view these investigations as disturbing and deeply ironic symbols of a dysfunctional church. It should be noted that some of the Vatican officials who championed the investigations are among those most complicit in the sexual-abuse scandal. But more fundamentally disheartening is the revelation that the church that champions human rights across the globe denies them to those members it deems deviant. Externally, the church expresses a commitment to dialogue with the religious other. Internally, however, no such commitment is evident. In Benedict's eyes women religious apparently are not capable of being dialogue partners; rather, we are treated like children, told what to think and how to behave.

The bitter irony is that in diversifying their programs, mission, and way of living in the world, women have merely obeyed what was asked of us. In the early 1960s the Belgian Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens urged that women's religious congregations utilize their "latent capacities" and enlarge their vocation by opening new dimensions. In his influential 1963 book *The Nun in the Modern World*, Suenens observed that women religious "[appear] to the faithful to be out of touch with the world as it is, an anachronism." Women religious, he recommended, must jettison outdated customs and costumes and "continually adapt to the demands of the moment." In October 1965 Vatican II issued *Perfectae caritatis*, the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, recommending that religious communities examine the "manner of life, of prayer, and of work" and see to it that "their members have a proper understanding of the conditions of the times and the needs of the church" in order to "help humanity more effectively."

And so we did. Contrary to hierarchs who charge that we have been misled by "radical feminism," we have in fact been led by our experiences among those with whom we live and work—people whose lives may be at variance with official teachings, yet who nonetheless strive to live with integrity and love of neighbor. As Sr. Margaret A. Farley said in regard to her book *Just Love*—a book harshly denounced by the CDF—"I wrote it because people are suffering." It is dismaying to have to point out to those hierarchs (or to any alert Christian) that the process of entering into the experience of suffering people opens new perspectives. The truth is that women religious did not set out to challenge church doctrine or governance; much more simply, our experiences have affected us, giving us new lenses on the world. We have learned more than we can bear about the unspeakable violence done to women worldwide through rape, sex trafficking, "honor" killings, and acid attacks. And we are faulted for not being more outspoken against contraception?

When the cardinal electors meet in the Sistine Chapel next month, will they elect a pope with sympathy for women's

experiences in and outside the church? Likely not. That is why I'm keeping in mind the counsel that St. Vincent de Paul gave to his Daughters of Charity: to act in the church with "holy cunning." And to that I will add, thanks to my late friend, that we must act with "strategic perseverance" as well. ■

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William L. Portier

On Monday, February 11, my wife called me at 7:30 in the morning. "The pope resigned," she said. "*Who*?" I replied.

Pope Benedict XVI surprised the whole world by announcing his resignation. As it turns out, he had been thinking about it for some time. Since the announcement, we have been reminded that, in a 2010 interview with the journalist Peter Seewald, Benedict mentioned the possibility of a papal resignation. And we've been reminded that he prayed at the tomb of Pope Celestine V, who resigned amid great turmoil in 1294. Benedict had witnessed the long decline of Pope John Paul II. By resigning, Benedict leaves to his successors an alternative to the example set by John Paul II, whose conscience did not permit him to leave the office to which he had been called by God. Benedict's conscience led him in a different direction, and his decision will have increasing significance in the future, as further medical advances increase the likelihood of a pope living beyond the time when he can fulfill his duties. Theologians who lament the lack of constitutional checks on the papacy will welcome this more recent precedent. Whatever one thinks of Benedict's papacy, his resignation is clearly an act of courage and humility—a gift of hope to the whole church. He reminded us that the papacy was about the church and not about him.

He leaves behind a mixed legacy. No pope in history—not even Leo the Great or Gregory the Great—was a better theologian in terms of breadth of knowledge and professional training, or according to the classic definition of the theologian as one who prays. Benedict's encyclicals on love and hope strike the reader with their clarity and depth. Apparently we will not have an encyclical on faith to complete the triad of the theological virtues. In his February 11 statement, the sentence in which he admits that he no longer has the strength to fulfill his office begins with an observation about the prospects for faith in a world "shaken by questions of deep relevance for the life of faith." We are left to wonder what more he might have said about these questions.

We do have *Caritas in veritate*. Written in the wake of 2008's worldwide economic collapse, this encyclical is simply brilliant in bringing the resources of the tradition to bear on that crisis. It should be required reading for those who make economic-policy decisions that affect human well-being. Benedict writes in this encyclical of the "grammar of creation," a phrase he applies to both natural law and the environment. His many interventions on environmental questions, especially climate change, and even the solar equipment he has had installed in the Vatican surely distinguish him as a "green pope."

Pope Benedict's three *Jesus of Nazareth* books, two of which I have used in graduate classes, grapple seriously with the present impasse between theology and exegesis, and offer signs of an approach to Scripture that is both theological and historical-critical. His Wednesday addresses on the saints and fathers of the church now run to three volumes and will be a lasting literary legacy.

For the foreseeable future, Benedict's 2005 interpretation of the Second Vatican Council, as neither rupture nor simple continuity but rather reform in continuity, remains the framework within which the council will be discussed and assessed. It also signals his passion for the unity of the church. On this front, he has made two controversial moves. First, his long-standing efforts to reconcile schismatic traditionalists to the church have included the introduction of the Extraordinary Rite of the Roman Liturgy. It is not clear whether this will have the effect he desired of leavening current liturgical practice with greater reverence and solemnity, or will instead just further polarize the church.

His creation of quasi-dioceses (ordinariates) for traditionalist Anglicans who wish to be in full communion with the church is another gamble whose long-term effects are not yet clear. The way this was carried out, through the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith rather than the curial office for ecumenism, makes clear how dysfunctional the Roman curia has become—or at least how unresponsive to the pope's wishes.

Sadly, we are still waiting for a pope who will publicly discipline the bishops complicit in the sexual abuse of children by priests.

Benedict chose as his own papal name that of the founder of Western monasticism. That choice reflects his preoccupation with Europe's Christian roots and his concern for its re-evangelization. His successor will have to steer the church through the demographic transition of decline in Europe and North America and growth in the global South. The next pope could well be African or Latin American. The Irish bookmaker Paddy Power has already laid down odds for the various *papabili*, but the Spirit blows where it will.

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Richard R. Gaillardetz

As the Catholic Church awaits the election of a new pope, we might pause to consider the ecclesiological significance of Pope Benedict XVI's resignation. As many have already suggested, the resignation itself is likely to constitute Benedict's greatest legacy, at least as pope.

When Benedict became pope in 2005, it was commonly assumed that his would be a pontificate in substantial continuity with that of his predecessor. The assumption was understandable given the dominant role Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had played as prefect of the CDF throughout much of John Paul II's pontificate. Any difference between the two pontificates, it was thought, would be subtle—more a matter of style than of substance. And certainly Benedict's style and taste were different from those of his predecessor. When it came to the liturgy, for example, John Paul was far more open to inculturation, while Benedict preferred a more somber and traditional approach, one deeply influenced by his Bavarian piety. In retrospect, however, it was Benedict's vision of the papacy itself that marked his most profound departure from his predecessor.

A charismatic figure comfortable on the public stage, John Paul II took full advantage of the symbolic power of the papacy in a media age. Even though he wrote more pages of ecclesiastical text than any pope in history, for many of us his pontificate was reflected less in his papal teaching than in a series of symbolic events: his meeting with leaders of world religions to pray for peace in Assisi, his prayer with the chief rabbi at the synagogue in Rome, the joint recitation with the ecumenical patriarch of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed in Greek (excluding the *filioque*!). All of us can call to mind photos of John Paul II praying in a room with his would-be assassin, kissing the ground of a country he was visiting for the first time, wagging his finger at Ernesto Cardenal during a visit to Nicaragua, and, finally, hunched over in a tableau of pain and physical incapacity during his final days.

Pope Benedict, the introverted theologian-pope, demonstrated little of his predecessor's aptitude for the compelling image. This was more than a difference in personality; Benedict had a more circumscribed view of the papacy from the very beginning. John Paul II saw his papacy as providential, even more so after the attempted assassination: he was convinced that the Blessed Mother had averted his death. He explicitly rejected the possibility of resignation as an unconscionable repudiation of his divine calling. By contrast, long before his election Ratzinger had frankly admitted that the Holy Spirit could be said to have only a limited and indirect role in the choice of a pope. He wryly noted that there had been too may popes who clearly were *not* the choice of the Spirit.

Benedict's resignation is consistent with this more modest view of the papacy. He understands well what was too

often forgotten over the course of the second millennium—namely, that a pope is pope only because he is bishop of the local church of Rome. Consequently, a papal resignation is, in principal, no different from any bishop's resignation or retirement from office. Benedict's resignation can be understood as a salutary reminder that the papacy is essentially an episcopal office, not a personal apotheosis.

But there is more that can be gleaned from his decision. Benedict resigned because his declining health meant that he could no longer fulfill the obligations of his office. Catholic teaching holds that all bishops—and in a preeminent way the bishop of Rome—are given the assistance of the Holy Spirit for the exercise of their office. Benedict's decision reflects a healthy theological anthropology, one according to which the assistance of the Holy Spirit is mediated in and through our human capabilities. As such, it is also inhibited by our human frailties and failings. The Holy Spirit's assistance does not simply override the diminishment of our created human capacities. Of course the applicability of this insight can be extended beyond the question of physical infirmity. The assistance of the Holy Spirit also does not magically overcome ignorance, an obstinate refusal to give proper attention to a difficult pastoral or doctrinal issue, or a failure to consult the wisdom of others.

Finally, Benedict's resignation invites a further question. Is the papacy, as currently configured, simply more than one person can handle? Even many who have been ideologically disposed to both Benedict and his predecessor have acknowledged dangerous blind spots in their administration of the church. John Paul II could not accept the obvious culpability of Marcial Maciel Degollado, founder of the Legionaries of Christ, who had been credibly accused of sexually abusing young boys and apparently fathered several children. Indeed, John Paul II harbored an uncritical enthusiasm for a wide array of new lay movements such as Opus Dei, the Neocatechumenal Way, Focolare, and Communion and Liberation. For his part, Benedict XVI made a series of blunders in public statements on Islam, condoms, clerical sexual abuse, and other topics. Eager to heal the schism with the Society of Pius X, Benedict prematurely removed the excommunications of four schismatic bishops, including one who had made outrageous anti-Semitic statements. Neither pope was known for particularly shrewd episcopal appointments, and many of those made by John Paul II were simply abysmal. Neither showed any interest in, or aptitude for, the administration or reform of the Vatican's bureaucracy.

Given the character of a global church with well over a billion members, Benedict's resignation invites us to consider whether it is time to reverse the centralization of papal authority that began in the early nineteenth century. At Vatican II, the church made a substantial effort to reverse the universalist ecclesiology of the preconciliar period and to recover an ancient understanding of the church as a *communio ecclesiarum*—a communion of churches. Local churches were no longer to be viewed as mere branch offices of a transnational organization; they were the church of Jesus Christ *in that place*. Bishops, it followed, were not vicars of the pope but the ordinary pastors of those churches. The council further recognized that all the bishops, as members of a college of which the bishop of Rome is both head and member, shared leadership responsibility for the universal church.

At the council, many bishops had discovered the value of meeting with brother bishops from the same region, and this sparked new interest in episcopal conferences as real, if only partial, expressions of episcopal collegiality. A number of council fathers enthusiastically supported the creation of a standing synod of bishops, of the kind common in Eastern Christianity, as a means of allowing bishops to share with the pope the exercise of universal pastoral leadership. But in a markedly uncollegial move, Pope Paul VI acted on his own authority, while the council was still in session, to create a synod of bishops that was a cheap facsimile of what the council fathers had envisioned. Instead of a standing synod exercising deliberative authority, the synod Pope Paul created was merely consultative and would meet only occasionally.

In the first decades after the council, episcopal conferences bore much fruit as an expression of collegiality. However, leading figures in the Roman Curia, including Cardinal Ratzinger, would soon challenge their status, leading eventually to the apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II, *Apostolos suos*, which dramatically restricted the conferences' authority.

Is it time to unburden the papacy by applying the principle of subsidiarity to the church? If so, then we might consider revivifying intermediate structures of authority, including those of metropolitans, new patriarchates (a possibility once championed by Ratzinger himself), and episcopal conferences, all functioning at levels between the papacy and the local diocese. Do we need to admit that the current authority granted to the curia is inherently dysfunctional and fundamentally at odds with the council's teaching on episcopal collegiality? If so, would we do better to redirect much of the authority currently residing in the curia toward a properly episcopal structure such as a standing synod? Finally, in light of Pope Benedict's honest and courageous action, we must ask ourselves whether there is something to learn from a more ancient time in the church when the pope was not so much the vicar of Christ as the vicar of Peter; not chief theologian, but court of final appeal; not monarch, but *pontifex*—literally, bridge-builder. ■

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Richard Alleva

Pillheads

'SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK' & 'SIDE EFFECTS'

Jennifer Lawrence & Bradley Cooper

THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

About fifteen minutes into *Silver Linings Playbook*, its hero, Pat Solitano—played by Bradley Cooper—is out jogging near his Philadelphia neighborhood when a young woman he met at a dinner party the night before runs across his path and greets him. In any other romantic comedy this would be the follow-up scene that firmed up the "meet cute" encounter of the previous night. This second meeting would be staged with playful mock-casualness, and the dialog would include lots of sexy banter and teasing as the lovers-to-be sized each other up.

Instead, writer-director David O. Russell delivers a few seconds that wouldn't be out of place in a psycho-stalker horror movie. Tiffany, played by Jennifer Lawrence, bursts into view emitting a high-pitched "Hey!" that unnerves Pat and made the viewers near me in the theater jump in their seats. And this turns out to be oddly appropriate since at their earlier encounter Pat and Tiffany recognized each other at once as being a tad crazy. Having taken offense at a remark her sister (the hostess) made, Tiffany had jumped to her feet and announced she was leaving, then glared at Pat: "Are you walking me home or what?" "You lack social skills," he murmured. "*I* lack social skills? You say more inappropriate things than anyone I've ever met." And the walk home concluded with her propositioning him unsuccessfully, then melting into his arms, and finally walloping him across the face. Cupid's arrow may have been loosed, but if so, it's been dipped in acid.

But this is a familiar pattern, isn't it? Hostility preceding love, hostility presaging love, hostility seasoning love. Think of *Pride and Prejudice* or *Much Ado About Nothing*. But *Silver Linings Playbook* gives this old pattern a modern twist: the lovers join in erotic combat fully armed with the verbal tools of therapy and self-development, as well as medicine cabinets bursting with psychotropic pills (though Pat believes he no longer needs them). Pat is bipolar and has just been released from a psychiatric ward, where he was sent after he beat up his wife's lover. He lives at home with a father (Robert DeNiro) who's an obsessive-compulsive gambler and a mother (Jacki Weaver) almost squashed by a household brimming with dysfunction. Tiffany, for her part, is weighted down with guilt because her husband died in a car accident before they could resolve some sexual problems. (He had taken a detour to buy a negligée for her.) For Tiffany and Pat, love wouldn't be just romance but also therapy.

Pat, though, has already planned a different sort of therapy for himself: his "silver linings" project. By reducing his mood swings through sheer will power and treating those around him with more care, he will win back his estranged wife. Tiffany, who has settled on Pat as the key to her mental survival, regards this as sheer self-deception. She believes Pat has become so obsessed with restoring the past that he's not alive to present possibilities. And Pat's determination to transform himself without medication is, she thinks, sheer hubris. She makes it her project to destroy his project in the hope of saving both him and herself.

David O. Russell drew his screenplay from Matthew Quick's serio-comic novel of the same title. Jettisoning the book's final section, in which the hero goes totally haywire before finally returning Tiffany's love, Russell amplifies the comedy of the one-sided courtship and curtails the storm and stress with a dance contest, thus bringing the action to a funny, goofily rousing, and forgivably sentimental close. Yet he doesn't overlook all the mental disturbance inherent in the material. The Solitano shouting matches and occasional slugfests, filmed by a mobile camera that is everywhere in the domestic maelstrom, show us what Pat is up against. Tiffany, for all her own mental problems, is probably right about what he needs. And it is to the credit of DeNiro, Weaver, and Cooper that they keep the fundamental decency of the Solitanos in view even when the rows

are at their noisiest. You feel the family's sanity constantly burrowing through the temporary insanity.

But what really makes *Silver Linings Playbook* special is Jennifer Lawrence, who won the Oscar for Best Actress for this performance. After her fine work in *Winter's Bone* and *The Hunger Games*, I expected something great from her some day, but I didn't expect the masterpiece to arrive so soon. The physical intrepidity she brought to her earlier roles she now transforms into an erotic and psychological neediness that is at once pathetic, comic, and a little bit frightening, though her romantic ruthlessness never alienates the audience. Her face has the rosy wholesomeness of the girl next door, but the eyes blaze. What Lawrence achieves here is what Bernard Shaw philosophized about in *Man and Superman* and what Katharine Hepburn turned into knockabout farce in *Bringing Up Baby*: the woman as compassionate and life-enhancing predator, caring for her prey more tenderly than he can for himself.

What they say about New England weather can be applied to Steven Soderbergh's *Side Effects*: if you don't like it, wait a minute. Or, to be precise, wait about twenty minutes. This movie keeps sliding from one genre into another.

At first the script by Scott Z. Burns promises an intense psychological study. A young woman, Emily Taylor (Rooney Mara), retreats into herself when her husband, a Wall Street whiz kid convicted of insider trading, comes home from prison. Apparently suffering from sleep deprivation and low sex drive, she slams her car into a wall. A hospital psychiatrist, Dr. Banks (Jude Law), compassionate but a bit of a hot shot, prescribes a drug that at first seems to work, but soon Emily starts acting like a zombie. When her husband comes home while she's chopping vegetables, she fatally stabs him in the stomach, then crawls into bed and blanks out while he pleads for her to call for help. Arrested and tried, she claims she remembers nothing of the deed. Shouldn't the drug be in the dock, too? And what about the psychiatrist who prescribed it? In all the scenes leading up to the killing, Soderbergh draws us close to Emily by keeping the camera near Rooney Mara's face, registering every tremor, every vibration of fear and distaste in the actress's waif-like countenance. The cinematography by "Peter Andrews" (a pseudonym for Soderbergh himself), alternating betweeen a warm salmon-pink for the close-ups and the coldest of blues for Emily's surroundings, makes us empathize with Emily as she withdraws from an unwelcoming world. The viewer naturally expects that this psychological drama will dig even deeper into Emily's psyche as the movie proceeds.

Well, tough luck, viewer, because after the husband's death, *Side Effects* turns (briefly) into a social studies discussion about the possibly catastrophic drawbacks of using wonder drugs to alleviate mental distress. The action shifts to Dr. Banks, well played by Law as a mixture of sincere kindness and frightened self-interest. And thanks to the good acting, believable dialogue, and Soderbergh's pacey direction, the film retains the viewer's attention despite this shift of focus. If we can't have a Bergmanesque character study, at least we'll get a big-screen installment of *In Treatment*.

Actually, we won't. For the doctor discovers an evil plot motivated by revenge, greed, and lesbianism. *Side Effects* ends not as a psychological study, nor as a social drama, but as a whodunit.

Isn't it legitimate, one may ask, for a thriller or mystery to deceive us for the sake of entertainment? Well, when you sit down to read an Agatha Christie story or watch a Hitchcock film, a bargain is struck: the storyteller will try to hoodwink you, and you will delight in being hoodwinked as long as it is done cleverly. But when Soderbergh and Burns spend nearly ninety minutes of screen time convincing you that you are watching a serious study of people in torment and then throw away everything they've achieved for the sake of a surprise ending, the wrong sort of hoodwinking has taken place. ■

William H. Pritchard

Dot-dot-dot-dash

The First Four Notes
Beethoven's Fifth and the Human Imagination
Matthew Guerrieri
Alfred A. Knopf, $26.95, 359 pp.

Matthew Guerrieri's highly original book opens by asserting that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony "might not be the greatest piece of music ever written...but it must be the greatest 'great piece' ever written." Beethoven himself preferred his Third Symphony, the *Eroica*; yet as this book assiduously demonstrates, the Fifth has accrued such diverse and continuing commentary—"successive mantles of greatness," as Guerrieri puts it—that it has no rival. Guerrieri calls his book "history viewed through the forced perspective of one piece of music," and its chapters furnish remarkable instances of various perspectives on the piece. *The First Four Notes* is not a work of musicology and doesn't attempt to take us through the symphony in its four-movement entirety. In fact, the only part of the symphony Guerrieri focuses on is its "iconic" opening, three eighth-notes followed by a single half-note marked with a fermata: dot-dot-dot-dash, in Morse code. But those first four notes are preceded by an eighth-note rest, slipped in before the first note; in other words, the downbeat is a silent one. This presents a tough job for conductors, one of whom called beginning the Fifth "one of the most feared conducting challenges in the whole classical repertoire."

The key of C minor was for Beethoven an especially portentous one; he also set his third piano concerto and his final sonata, Op. 111, in what Guerrieri calls the composer's "stormiest" key. Such storminess was very much in accord with the reputation he was achieving for temperamental outbursts—the most notorious of them occurring when Beethoven, hearing that Napoleon had assumed the title of emperor, furiously scratched his dedication off the *Eroica*'s title page. Guerrieri argues that the "disorienting opening" to the Fifth Symphony "echoes the upheavals of the French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftershocks." He notes that the pianist, composer, and Beethoven pupil Carl Czerny attributed the opening notes to the song of a forest-bird, the yellowhammer, which Beethoven heard in a Vienna park; but in time this reduction to such a homely source was dismissed, as the Fifth gathered all sorts of more heroic, indeed tragic, associations.

The most influential review of the symphony was made in 1810 by the German writer E. T. A. Hoffmann, who found in it an "unnamable, foreboding longing." Continuing in this vein, other Romantics viewed the symphony as "a representation of a limitless beyond," in contrast with the classical harmony of Mozart. The combination of the first four notes as a "knocking on the door," whether by Fate or some comparable agency, reached its pinnacle of freighted meaning with Richard Wagner. Using Schopenhauer's aesthetics, Wagner found Beethoven to be "the epitome of German-ness." For Guerrieri, Wagner "completes the full turn of the wheel from the Enlightenment to the Romantic,"

from controlled logic to subconscious fantasy, from a conviction that reason and rationality can explain the human condition, to the aesthetic ideal represented in the purposefully incomprehensible musical strivings of a deaf composer.

Detail of a portrait of Beethoven by Joseph Karl Stieler, 1820

Wagner was ready to deify deafness, even though Beethoven was not yet deaf when he composed the symphony.

The First Four Notes is chock full of Fifth Symphony–related curiosities and trivia. Guerrieri's breezy inclusiveness (his diction contains phrases such as "mission creep," "boy toy," and the execrable "get-go") doesn't flinch at combining potted summaries of aesthetics in Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche with outré comparisons, as when he finds Beethoven's heroic music "a lot like Steve McQueen's acting," since in both the performing energies are "directed outward, at the listener, not inward, drawing the listener." After reviewing my memory of Steve McQueen in *Bullitt*, I decided the parallel is not worth pushing very far, if at all. In a chapter titled "Associations," Guerrieri moves to the American handling of the Fifth, beginning with John Sullivan Dwight, one of the first serious music critics in this country. Dwight was a Transcendentalist, a pillar of the Brook Farm community, for whom the symphony's opening "fills the mind with a strange uncertainty, as it does the ear." He would lead parties of companions into Boston to hear Beethoven's music, then, exhilarated, walk back at night the seven miles to Brook Farm.

The major American composer who took the symphony seriously was Charles Ives, who in his *Concord Sonata* collected different uses to which the four notes had been put. One of the more bizarre American events related to the Fifth was the arrest of Karl Muck, a German conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra during World War I. His markings on the score of the symphony were scanned by the authorities for evidence of coded espionage; soon Muck was fired, then transported to a military base in northern Georgia to be interned for more than a year. Eventually he made his way back to the fatherland and never again conducted in America—though he lived to receive an accolade from that old music-lover Adolf Hitler.

My favorite literary use of the symphony occurs in E. M. Forster's novel *Howards End*, whose fifth chapter opens by declaring Beethoven's Fifth "the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated into the ear of man." Forster's delightful anatomy of the different ways his characters respond to the symphony can't be bettered, though Guerrieri also adduces the closing scene of Shaw's *Heartbreak House* (written during World War I), in which, as planes drop explosives nearby, Hesione Hushabye declares, "It's like an orchestra: it's like Beethoven"—to which the impressionable Ellie Dunn replies, "By thunder, Hesione: it is Beethoven." During World War II the four notes were famously used as the V for Victory signal, and dot-dot-dot-dash became an on-the-air announcement for the BBC. On Armistice Day 1943, Bruno Walter and the New York Philharmonic played the victory theme, followed by a minute of silence and "The Star-Spangled Banner," successfully conscripting Beethoven

into the war effort. And though I myself first encountered the Fifth through one of Arturo Toscanini's recordings, I was unaware that, when Mussolini fell, Toscanini gave a concert titled "Victory Symphony, Act I," which included the symphony's first movement—with the rest promised when Germany was defeated. That performance occurred on V-E Day in May 1945, and was conducted at a whirlwind pace—"as if Toscanini was annexing Beethoven back from the Nazis," Guerrieri remarks, "with a blitzkrieg of his own."

At times later in this book, I felt somewhat overwhelmed by so much assiduous cataloguing of uses of the Fifth. Do I need to know about its relevance to disco and hip-hop, as in the film *Saturday Night Fever*? Or its current function as a ringtone for cellphones? I was, however, pleased to note that—unbelievably—there exists at least one cultural use of the piece Guerrieri seems to have overlooked. This is the poet Richard Wilbur's "C Minor," one of his wittiest, most affecting poems. "C Minor" opens with the question of how much heroic sound one is prepared to take in as the day begins:

Beethoven during breakfast? The human soul,
Though stalked by hollow pluckings, winning out
(While bran-flakes crackle in the cereal-bowl)
Over despair and doubt?

"You are right to switch it off and let the day / Begin at hazard," the speaker tells his breakfast partner, then proceeds to imagine some of the things, fortunate or unfortunate, which may occur in the day ahead. Whatever happens, Wilbur concludes, we don't need an early morning wake-up call to it, since

There is nothing to do with a day except to live it.
Let us have music again when the light dies
(Sullenly, or in glory) and we can give it
Something to organize. ■

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Mary Ellen Konieczny

United Front

Breaking Through

Catholic Women Speak for Themselves

Edited by Helen M. Alvaré

Our Sunday Visitor Press, $16.95, 173 pp.

Even though prolife activist and law professor Helen Alvaré dismisses feminism in her introduction to *Breaking Through: Catholic Women Speak for Themselves*, the book ends up proving the feminist adage that "the personal is political." Written by and for women who wholeheartedly embrace church teachings concerning sexuality and gender, the essays in this collection may evoke indifference among some readers and anger among others. Yet *Breaking Through* is worth reading, both for its stories of faith and for its window on the fractious landscape of contemporary American Catholicism.

In discussing how Catholicism intersects with everyday experiences of dating, work, love, and family life, the book's authors aim—as do feminists—to bring personal experiences and perspectives to bear on the politics of issues like abortion, contraception, clergy sexual abuse, and same-sex marriage. The premise of the book is as follows. The general public is curious about Catholic women and their relationship to the church, but ill-informed. Most Americans believe that Catholic teachings, especially those concerning human sexuality, are contrary to women's interests and out of step with contemporary thought because they inhibit women's rights and freedoms. "Catholic women in agreement with this perspective," Alvaré asserts, "get ample media play. The rest of us have to create our own opportunities."

And here they do. The authors are at their best when speaking from their own experiences—of mothering, materialism, vocation, or simple human connection—and of the ways in which their Catholicism has deepened over time. Elise Italiano discusses the difficulty of being a single woman who wants to save sexual intimacy for marriage while participating in a dating culture where casual sexual availability is the norm. Mary Hallan FioRito writes of her efforts to put material possessions and her love of fine things into proper balance with family life, a challenge in which her marvelous acquaintance with the saints provides unexpected help. And Kim Daniels extols the importance of fidelity to parish and neighborhood in everyday life, urging Catholic women to dedicate themselves, as did their forebears, to practical actions that create cohesion in community and parish.

Even if not everyone shares the tra-

CHARLOT

ditionalism of their view of women and Catholicism, these voices deserve to be heard. The essays that do not engage personal experiences prove less interesting. Many of these chapters grapple with culture-war issues, including single motherhood and homosexuality, and use data gleaned from social science to reach conclusions that predictably support church teachings and views of social problems. Alvaré's essay on single motherhood is a case in point. Although she cites some of the best recent research about single mothers, her suggestions for reducing single motherhood fail to consider sufficiently the economic and cultural conditions that many single mothers encounter. Similarly, Michelle Critella, a medical doctor who writes about homosexuality, mentions that she experienced same-sex attraction as a teen—then uses her essay to build a research-based case for church teachings requiring celibate chastity of homosexuals, overlooking the importance of sexual identity in human experience.

I do not believe one necessarily needs personal experience of a social problem in order to have insight into it. But these authors appear at times to lack genuine understanding of the structural causes of the problems they examine—and, as a result, they too freely propose solutions to other people's problems without considering other people's circumstances. This limitation is political. *Breaking Through* presents not only a univocal religious point of view, but a privileged swath of women's experience. Although Alvaré emphasizes their diversity, these essayists are nearly all middle-class, well educated, professionally accomplished, and if married, successfully so. Given the book's premise, it is disappointing that Catholic women who are single parents or have had an unwanted pregnancy, for example, were not invited into this discussion. Whatever the reason for this exclusion, the book's roster of contributors reflects all too well the demography of the conservative politics the book articulates.

Breaking Through is a mixed blessing. Its nine essays are often thoughtful and sometimes perceptive, and give Catholic women an opportunity to be heard on political issues. The faith journeys described in these pages, which often include long-ago personal struggles with the church, are honest and at times beautiful. But the exclusion of viewpoints from women who *currently* struggle with church teachings is a political choice itself and one with ironic results. Though it aspires to a countercultural agenda, *Breaking Through* not only reproduces the polarized politics of the broader culture, but is in danger of being co-opted by it. In my view, its limited choice of voices is more likely to contribute to division and doctrinal exclusion within the Catholic community than to the inclusive universality that is Catholicism's distinctive genius. ■

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Celia Wren

Family Guy

Great Expectations
The Sons and Daughters of Charles Dickens
Robert Gottlieb
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $25, 246 pp.

The Great Charles Dickens Scandal
Michael Slater
Yale University Press, $30, 215 pp.

Today's celebrities may think they have it bad, what with hacks and photographers lying in wait, hoping to funnel gossip into *People* magazine. But will scholars still be stalking Justin Bieber and Katie Holmes a century and a half from now?

They're still stalking Charles Dickens, who died back in 1870. True, scuttlebutt about the author of *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* is more likely to come from archives than from a reporter with a telephoto lens. Still, two new nonfiction books about the nineteenth-century writer—whose professional success couldn't eclipse his failings as a family man—seem almost as hungry for intimate revelation as any informant selling tips to *TMZ*.

Admittedly, it's a very dignified and judicious hunger in the case of *Great Expectations: The Sons and Daughters of Charles Dickens*. Absorbing, elegant, and succinct (readers who haven't read a full Dickens biography should do that first), Robert Gottlieb's book offers brief biographies of the novelist's ten children, plus a chapter speculating about a rumored illegitimate offspring. Well stocked with historical, literary, and psychological insights, not to mention a handsome collection of illustrations, *Great Expectations* is an intriguing look at how the Victorians measured personal and professional success and failure. But chiefly it's a poignant portrait of ordinary individuals struggling to cope with the legacy of a famous, intimidatingly accomplished parent.

Dickens's stratospheric celebrity was not the only shadow looming over his progeny. There was also the very public scandal surrounding his decision to separate from his wife Catherine in 1858, after she had borne him seven sons and three daughters over more than two decades of marriage. By this point, Dickens had already met Ellen Ternan, the young actress who would become his protégé and probably his lover.

With such emotional baggage as their birthright, one can hardly wonder that the novelist's children were largely underachievers. The survivor himself of a hardscrabble youth—including a famous stint as a child laborer in a blacking factory—Dickens strove to launch his sons in various lines of work, only to see several of them flounder. A number of the boys were financially reckless. Sydney Smith Haldimand Dickens, the fifth son, racked up so much debt during his years as a sailor that Dickens ultimately banished him from the house. "I begin to wish that he were honestly dead," the disappointed father wrote of Sydney in a letter.

The relatively more successful and prosperous children capitalized on their father's reputation after his death, acknowledging that their own lives were ancillary to his. After muddling along as a sheep-farmer-turned-wool-merchant-turned-station-agent in Australia, Alfred D'Orsay Tennyson Dickens found a more lucrative niche giving public lectures about his father. Even Henry Fielding Dickens, who became a very successful lawyer, gave readings from his dad's work for charity. Mary Angela Dickens, known as Mamie, penned rhapsodic memoirs about her father. She never married, writing to a friend, "It is a glorious inheritance to have such blood flowing in one's veins. I am so glad I never changed my name." After chronicling her outsized grief over the death of her pet Pomeranian, Gottlieb gently remarks that Mamie's devotion to her father "turned out not to be a successful recipe for a healthy and satisfying life as an adult."

Gottlieb sensibly ends by comparing Dickens's real children to the fictional youngsters who flock through the novels: figures like the Artful Dodger from *Oliver Twist*, the abused Smike from *Nicholas Nickleby*, and Little Nell of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Though some writers have spotted resemblances between certain characters and members of the Dickens brood, Gottlieb sees "almost no overlap." Instead, he deduces that "the Olivers and the Nells and the Smikes are projections of Dickens's own unassuageable need to see himself as a fatally wounded child."

And what projections they are: vivid, idiosyncratic, and strangely solid. After finishing Gottlieb's *Great Expectations*, you can't help reflecting that, set beside such lively whippersnappers, Mamie and her siblings seem pale and insubstantial—not because Gottlieb has done a bad job (limited data survive about certain aspects of his subjects' lives), but because the novelist endowed his characters with such timeless definition and presence.

Even more elusive is Ellen Ternan, who's a name but hardly a personality in *The Great Charles Dickens Scandal*. Dickens specialist Michael Slater's dense book summarizes, often in mind-numbing detail, the meager evidence about Dickens's extramarital liaison that has turned up over the years. The volume does offer some mildly diverting tales of scholarly sleuthing: Felix Aylmer (1898–1979) made a key contribution to Ternan-love-nest lore by examining nineteenth-century British railroad routes and public financial records for the town of Slough, for instance. (Dickens seems to have used a pseudonym to pay expenses for a house in Slough that may have been Ternan's residence.)

But the paper trail is tantalizingly inconclusive. Assessing the evidence as to whether the two had a platonic relationship, or whether, as has been rumored, they had an infant who died, Slater throws up his hands and titles an epilogue "Will We Ever Know?"

Despite the occasional sketchiness of the stories and personalities in Slater's and Gottlieb's books, these new volumes do supply some insight into the Dickens phenomenon. In particular, they suggest that the novelist's domestic and personal foibles were the flip side of his artistic prowess. The author sometimes known as Boz was impressively prolific; and he busied himself with other professional activities too, serving as editor for sundry periodicals and giving high-profile public readings, for instance. Given that level of energy and discipline, who can wonder that his private existence was sometimes self-indulgent, ineffective, and fuzzily prioritized?

And perhaps our fascination with Dickens's dirty laundry is a good thing. As Slater points out, anecdotes about Dickens's marital lapses convey a special frisson because the writer was a famous "celebrant of hearth, home, and family love." That "radiant domesticity," to use Slater's term, is hardly a draw these days, even if tolerance is extended on a seasonal basis to the feel-good Cratchit-clan scenes in *A Christmas Carol*. People today sometimes associate Dickens primarily with primness and cloying sentimentality, or with the social-reform perspective that can give a somber cast to his descriptions of prisons and other Victorian institutions. Maybe a little more scandal would banish this aura of preachiness and bathos and allow more readers to see the humor, manic energy, and weirdness in Dickens's work. ■

Celia Wren *is* Commonweal*'s media critic.*

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Book

The Tears I Couldn't Cry: Behind Convent Doors by Patricia Grueninger Beasley, pub 2009 AuthorHouse, ISBN 9781438962900

Award-winning memoir raises questions: Were sisters no more than pawns? Where were justice and accountability? Available at amazon.com. See customer reviews.

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www.shutupinchurch.com

A discussion of behavior reform in the House of God.

High-Concept Verdi

Terrence W. Tilley

All too often, ambitious opera directors move operas from one time and place to another in an attempt to "improve" them via this or that bold new concept. In 1976 Patrice Chéreau's notorious Bayreuth production placed Wagner's *Ring* on a Rhine River (or possibly Hudson) blighted by tenements and a mammoth hydropower plant. Jonathan Miller's controversial 1982 production of Verdi's *Rigoletto* situated the opera in mob-dominated Little Italy in New York. The Metropolitan Opera's current productions have moved Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* from its original seventh-century setting to the late nineteenth, and Beethoven's *Fidelio* from late-eighteenth-century Seville to a placeless twentieth-century prison.

And now the Met's new *Rigoletto* recasts the opera's promiscuous Duke as a Sinatra-like playboy operating a casino in 1960s Vegas. As for Rigoletto himself, he's no longer a hunchbacked court jester in sixteenth-century Mantua, but a vicious sycophant whose costume—tacky sweaters, while the rat pack don tuxedos—reveals him as a despised sidekick to the in crowd. His daughter, Gilda, is a naïve teenager whom the Duke (aided by the rat pack) rapes. The cuckhold Monterone, whose curse moves the opera's action, is an Arab sheik, not a noble fellow.

Traditionalists tend to hate this kind of thing, and often for good reason. Concept operas can sacrifice plot or characters for the sake of being "avant garde." They can disfigure a piece almost beyond recognition, in the process often obscuring the heart of the opera: the music. In an era like ours, blessed with elegant, world-class singing actors, overshadowing the performers is disgraceful.

Yet some concepts succeed in illuminating the plot or characters by transplanting them. Puccini's *La Bohème* and Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore* travel well. And while critics excoriated Mary Zimmerman for not halting the action during the sextet in the Met's *Lucia*, her gimmick of getting a large cast all lined up for a wedding picture while the principals expressed their inmost thoughts and feelings in lovely, intricate music improved vastly on the typical "park and bark" approach to bel canto high points.

While the audience at the Met's January 28 premiere of *Rigoletto* did not get violent, as happened in 1976 in Bayreuth, some boos were heard. In my view they were misguided, because the new Met production is a success. It is graced with a brilliant young conductor, Michele Mariotti. The singing and acting are uniformly excellent: Diana Damrau sings exquisitely and brings forth a nuanced realization of Gilda's character, while Željko Lucic sings Rigoletto with graceful phrasing and burnished power. Piotr Beczala's wonderfully sung Duke performs a stripper's pole dance

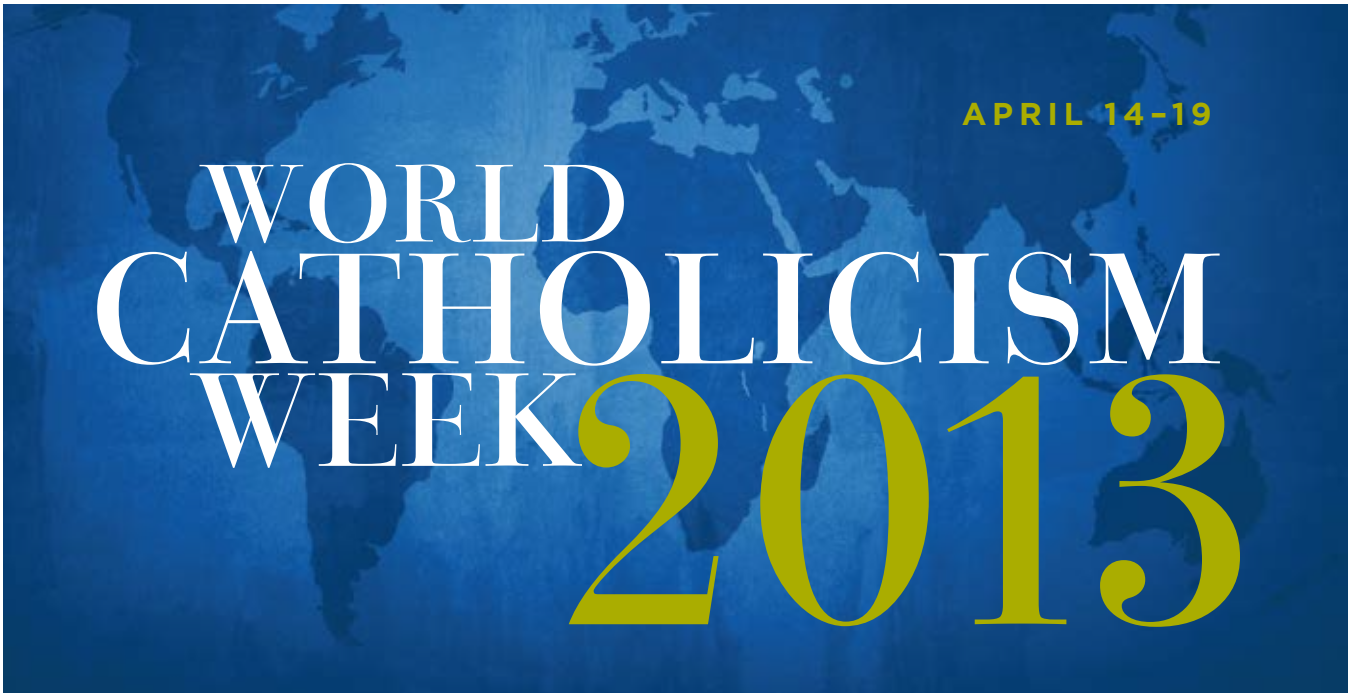
while singing "La Donna è Mobile," revealing himself as a fickle, promiscuous predator.

Such a performance typifies the way director Michael Meyer and his team have used a concept to reveal just how corrupt and horrid the opera's characters are. Bringing this production to a mythic time and place all too much like our own does not conceal the power of *Rigoletto*, but rather reveals and focuses it. And far from making great singers play second fiddle, the Met's new *Rigoletto* empowers the musicians to perform a gleaming score brilliantly. The concept works equally well as music and as theater.

In its original setting, *Rigoletto* remains distant enough to hide the obscenity of its characters beneath the beauty of its music. Meyer's glitzy, neon-lit casino staging possesses an over-the-top audacity that helps reveal the characters' shallow hedonism. No audience can avoid seeing how accursed such a beastly and self-defeating way of life is. For all the beauty of the music, the true tragedy is revealed, and we comprehend that the emotion most foreign to the characters is love. Rigoletto's paternal love for Gilda is a private emotion, not a way of life. Gilda's "love" for the Duke moves from infatuation to sexual slavery.

The difference between good and bad concept operas resembles the difference between good and bad preaching. Like bad preaching, many concept-opera productions amount to a kind of *eisegesis*; they impose a meaning on the work, one that does not grow out of the work. But good preaching employs *exegesis*, drawing out from the text a meaning that is there but not always noticed. The Met's rat-pack *Rigoletto* does this and does it wonderfully, interpreting a familiar work exegetically, so that we can see the human reality amid the lovely music. It shows us what perhaps we might have overlooked: that the court and its jester are cursed not merely by Monterone, but also by the life they lead. And *that* is a concept that works. ■

Terrence W. Tilley *is Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ, Professor of Catholic Theology and chair of the Department of Theology at Fordham University. His most recent book is* Faith: What It Is and What It Isn't *(Orbis).*



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APRIL 14–17

THE BORDERS OF BAPTISM: MULTIPLE BELONGINGS & TRANSNATIONAL PROCESSES OF CATHOLIC FORMATION

John Allen—Vatican journalist, *National Catholic Reporter* & CNN

Stanley Hauerwas, Ph.D.—Author, *the Peaceable Kingdom*

Bishop Paride Taban—Founder, Holy Trinity Peace Village–Kuron (Sudan)

APRIL 18

WWJD ON FACEBOOK?

Jana Bennett—Author, *Aquinas on the Web? Doing Theology in an Internet Age*

Brent Laytham—Author, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play: Theological Engagements with Entertainment*

APRIL 19

"I WAS IN PRISON & YOU VISITED ME:" SPIRITUALITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

Sr. Helen Prejean, C.S.J.—Author, *Dead Man Walking*

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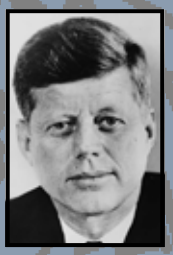
Human Dignity in World Affairs

Celebrating *Pacem in Terris* and its Legacy

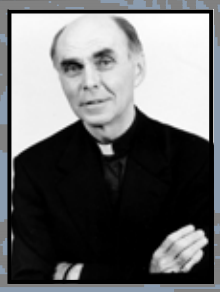
April 12, 2013 10am—3:30pm

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Pope John XXIII promulgated *Pacem in Terris*, "Peace on Earth", on April 11,1963, in the depths of the Cold War and after the Second Vatican Council had concluded its first of four sessions. Released just weeks before his death but five months after the chilling standoff between President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev in the Cuban Missile Crisis, the encyclical became the decisive last will and testament of Pope John and the charter Vatican II needed to embrace an agenda for peace, human dignity and human rights. Fifty years later, the ideas developed in *Pacem in Terris* retain their centrality for contemporary world affairs.



JUBILEE CELEBRATION OF VATICAN II AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY



KEYNOTE LECTURE

J. Bryan Hehir
Parker Gilbert Montgomery Professor of the Practice of Religion and Public Life
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University

Pacem in Terris: Origins and Impact

Alberto Melloni
Professor of History of Christianity
University of Modena and Reggio Emilia
Director, John XXIII Foundation for Religious Studies, Bologna

Maryann Cusimano Love
Associate Professor of International Relations
The Catholic University of America

Gerard Mannion
Professor of Theology and Religious Studies
University of San Diego

Human Dignity in Contemporary International Affairs

Paula J. Dobriansky
Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University

Drew Christiansen, S. J.
Editor in Chief (Ret.), America Magazine
Former Director, International Justice and Peace, USCC

Anthony Arend
Professor of Government and Foreign Service
Georgetown University

This event is free and open to the public.
For registration and more information, contact Georgetown University, Washington, DC
www.georgetown.edu/vatican-II-pacem-in-terris.html