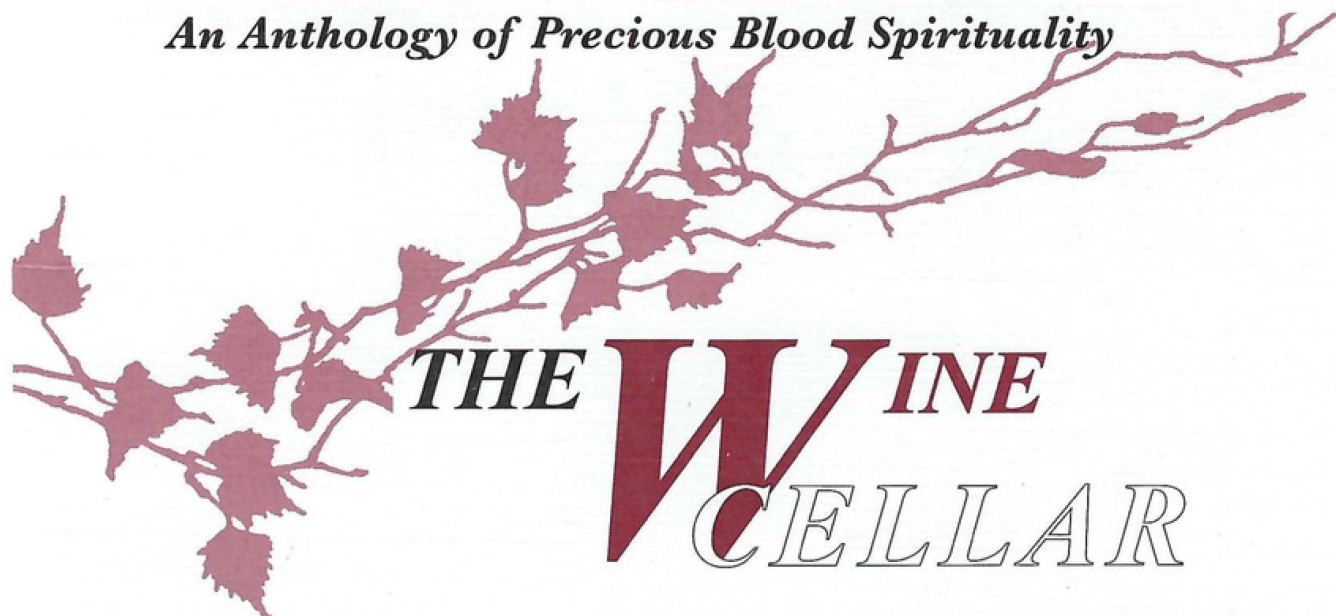


*An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality*



**THE** **W**INE  
CELLAR

Fall 2004 • Number 16

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**In God We Trust**

*The heart of Jesus  
is the wine cellar  
of the Blood of Christ*

**Gaspar del Bufalo**

*The  
Wine Cellar*

*An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality*

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From the  
*Wine Cellar*



## Let Freedom Ring: Liberating the Human Spirit

*Perhaps the greatest challenge facing American Catholics  
is to maintain that spirit of openness to the surrounding world.  
If the Church does that, it establishes itself firmly  
in the tradition of individuals like John Carroll...and Dorothy Day.*

Michael Perko, SJ  
*Catholic & American: A Popular History*

**I**t has been a long, hot summer on the campaign trail. And that trail has led directly to chanceries and cathedrals and churches where a few bishops have put up “no trespassing” signs at the communion rail for some Catholic politicians. Some of these bishops have even gone so far as to say that if a Catholic votes for a politician who is pro-choice, the voter should go to confession before returning to the table of Eucharist.

One of these bishops, appearing on a national news program, was asked why a Catholic politician who supports the death penalty could receive communion but a candidate who is pro-choice could not receive the sacrament. The bishop replied that the state’s right to execute certain individuals is not “intrinsically evil.”

In response to these few bishops who have blurred the lines between church and state while using the Eucharist as their weapon of choice, Pax Christi USA, the national Catholic peace movement will place an advertisement in major Catholic publications less than a month before the 2004 presidential election. In the ad, Pax Christi quotes the entire U.S. Catholic conference and its statement, “Faithful Citizenship,” in which the bishops write:

“A Catholic moral framework does not easily fit the ideologies of ‘right’ or ‘left,’ nor the platforms of any party...Our responsibility is to measure all candidates, policies, parties, and platforms by how they protect or undermine the life, dignity, and rights of the human person, whether they protect the poor and vulnerable and advance the common good.”

As Pax Christi points out, “It is a common misperception of politicians seeking office that the Catholic vote can be courted by addressing a narrow range of issues....The Catholic Church teaches that ALL life is sacred. A candidate for office must understand that the Church stands against any policy or course of action which diminishes life, dignity or the rights of the human person: abortion, capital punishment, war, scandalous poverty, denial of healthcare, mistreatment of immigrants and racism, to name but a few. All are essential issues to a ‘pro-life’ voter.”

This issue of *The Wine Cellar* addresses Catholic identity, religious fidelity and civic responsibility. The starting point for inviting our readers to submit manuscripts in response to the question, “What does it mean to be Catholic in America?” was a poll conducted by John Zogby in which he found “American Catholics are Americans first, Catholics second.” In an interview with *National Catholic Reporter* (January 30, 2004), Zogby said that Catholics in the United States “will not tolerate Catholic leaders who fail to acknowledge that their leadership is accountable to both God and man.”

James Urbanic begins our examination by offering a historical perspective of the “relationship between an American Catholic and being a Catholic American.” Acknowledging that “Catholics are now in the mainstream of American life,” Urbanic documents how “for many the relationship between ‘American’ and ‘Catholic’ is an uneasy partnership.”

While Father Urbanic brings us to “the porch of Precious Blood spirituality” in exploring this relationship, Lucy Fuchs opens the door by asking, “Can American culture be redeemed by the blood of Christ?” Fuchs reflects on three aspects of American culture—materialism, individualism, and the denial of suffering and death—that seem to conflict with the message of Jesus.

Dan Torson offers a personal perspective on these questions of identity and the relationship between American and Catholic by giving “voice to one group within the American Catholic Church” that remains faithful even in the face of “tragic abuses of power within the Church.” Al O’Dell echoes Torson’s belief that precious blood spirituality reflects “the ministry of compassion and reconciliation” by underscoring four attitudes that help us embrace “the redemptive opportunities of the

moment.” These four attitudes—reverence, listening, seeking common ground and being prophetic—addresses eloquently how precious blood spirituality influences our identity as Catholics in the culture of the United States of America.

Claiming we “live inculturated lives at a precise moment in history,” Ernest Ranly contends that “to be American means to be religious in a distinctively American (Christian) way.” Ranly outlines three areas—liturgy, civil/political, and inter-religious dialogue—in which he sees “American Catholic as a distinct reality and as a living challenge.” Affirming Michael Perko’s belief that “the greatest challenge facing American Catholics is to maintain that spirit of openness to the surrounding world,” Ranly maintains that after 9/11, to be an American Catholic today “must mean openness to Christian ecumenism.”

Keith Branson concludes this issue by focusing on how “the American paradigm of state religiosity sets the standard for citizenship and how Catholicism and Gaspar’s charism find themselves in basic conflict with that standard.” Using the twin pillars of freedom and justice that are found both in Catholicism and civil religion, Branson explores the apocalyptic language in early American thought and in modern literature and political policy. He concludes that “Gaspar’s refusal to take the loyalty oath to Napoleon in 1810 is faithful to the American icon of freedom in the best sense of the word.”

Sprinkled throughout this issue of *The Wine Cellar* are thoughtful and thought-provoking poetic reflections from Mary Anne Schiller, Anita Fearday, and Madeleine Kisner. Though we were unable to publish all the material submitted, we are most grateful to all who responded to our invitation to contribute to this edition.

Earlier this year as certain bishops were waging battles with politicians, a friend sent me a story about the death of a priest in Berkeley, California who was well-known for his zeal in living his Catholic identity and embracing his civic responsibility. Father Bill O’Donnell was an activist who “often described social justice as the armpit on the Mystical Body of Christ” because “fighting for the poor, for immigrants, for labor unions, for peace must be done in a tough arena. It gets dirty, hot, sweaty, confined, and sometimes stinking in there.” His funeral brought together “two bishops—one conservative, one liberal—sharing the sanctuary with the honor guard of red-flag-waving United Farm workers” and many of the activists who were proud to share a prison cell with Father O’Donnell during one of the 230 times he was arrested “for protesting social injustice.” As the homilist noted, Father O’Donnell “brought the moral authority of the Catholic Church and his personal integrity” to every issue as “he

represented the best tradition of Catholic Social Teaching.”

Father O’Donnell seemed to understand intuitively what it means to be a practicing Catholic and citizen of the United States. At the core of his being, Father O’Donnell was a faithful son of the church who believed in a theology of liberation because, as he said a few years ago, “I can’t imagine any other kind” because “its purpose has to be to liberate the human spirit.”

This issue of *The Wine Cellar* seeks to tap this sense of liberation that belongs to all of us as citizens of the reign of God who while we are living in this world fulfill our civic responsibility, as we remain faithful to our call to live as ambassadors of Christ.

- **Joe Nassal, CPPS**



Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness  
of all communities and states.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.  
We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,  
Tied in a single garment of destiny.  
Whatever affects one directly,  
Affects all indirectly.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**  
**Letters from a Birmingham Jail**

# Faith and Flag: Exploring the Relationship Between Church and Culture

**By James Urbanic, CPPS**

**T**he purpose of this article is to trace some recent history in the relationship between being an American Catholic and being a Catholic American. This survey will end on the porch of Precious Blood spirituality, but will not go in the door. I will leave to others how our redeeming spirituality can be the proper lens to address the history I examine here.

Some American Catholics lament the mixing between the Catholic Church and United States culture, saying that America has watered down the Catholic faith or that the values of America and the values of the Catholic Church are opposed. In some ways this is true. There is a tension for American Catholics: How can we be both at the same time? Jay Dolan, a Catholic historian at Notre Dame, sets the tone:

“In 1870, Catholics were struggling with the question of what it meant to be an American; comfortably American in 1965 they now struggled with a more fundamental question: what it meant to be Catholic. Just when they had solved one half of the riddle—what it meant to be American—the other half came unraveled.”<sup>1</sup>

It is important to see the Catholic Church in its historical American context. The Church brings to America much of its European tradition, theology and hermeneutics. The Church came to the United States basically in the eighteenth century, and for much of the nineteenth century it sat uneasily within and more easily along side of the United States. Only after the Second World War did the Church genuinely enter into the mainstream of American life. During much of its history United States culture was suspect by the Church. It could be felt right up to the 1960 presidential election. The United States was a large country, with endless fields and endless potential for the faith. It had a beginning that was like no other the Church had encountered. In other



countries of the Americas the Church was part of the founding; but this was not true in the United States. Catholics came later and found a country already in the making. Some parts of the United States were more heavily Catholic than others (Louisiana, the Hispanic Southwest).

For the most part the United States was tolerant of Catholics, but this was uneven. The 1830s and 1840s saw a pattern of bigotry toward Catholics, especially in the Puritan East, some of which still continues today. Historically the Church grew at a quicker rate than the non-Catholic population of the United States. Today the Catholic Church is the largest religious denomination in America, with almost twenty-five percent of the population. It is still growing, while some mainline Protestant denominations are receding.

### **Separation Seeking Balance**

**J**ohn Carroll, America's first bishop, wanted a decisive separation of Church and State. This separation is a two-edged sword: protecting Catholics from religious bigotry yet leaving it unguarded against a secular culture. The Christian monarchy system of much of Europe was not desired in this new country.

In looking toward an American Catholic Church, there is some danger in capturing a culture and making that culture its own. It is dangerous because American culture could be uncritical of the gospel, even at variance with it and incapable of conversion. American Catholics have embraced American culture. For years we were eager to 'fit in.' Now we have fit in, perhaps too neatly. But there is a balance in being both Catholic and American. The Catholic Church is more universal than is America. It finds a home in many countries. It lives in American culture yet it lives in many cultures. It is the same Catholic Church in every country, yet it is inculturated differently in every country.

Bishop James Malone, former President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, notes that from Bishop John Carroll (1789) onwards two forces were shaping American Catholicism: to make America a transplant of European Catholics and very Roman and to make Catholicism a special part of the United States and more American than Roman (seen in Orestes Brownson, Isaac Hecker, and Bishop John Ireland). The first force won the day until recently; now force number two is in the ascendancy. The balance of these forces is the key to an American Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup>

Few would dispute the contention of authors Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney that in the 1960s "Catholics joined the ranks of the mainline and in so doing took both the burdens and the glory of

identifying with the dominant culture.”<sup>3</sup> For the first time there was a joining of the Catholic Church to the culture of the United States. It happened almost overnight. Catholics are now in the mainstream of American life. Roof and McKinney call this “an uneasy partnership.” Speaking of both mainline Protestant denominations as well as the Catholic Church, they write:

“Faith and culture are closely intertwined, making for some distinctive features of American religion. One is its secular, all-pervasive quality: more than a sacramental, an ecclesiastical, a dogmatic-confessional, or a transcendently directed faith, religion in this country is directed toward the actual world in which people live. A second is its almost total acceptance of the social environment. A third feature is its dynamic, populist character: religious styles and institutions are inevitably influenced by the moods and sentiments of the people.”<sup>4</sup>

### *Catholics are now in the mainstream of American life.*

If these three characteristics are true then there are some cautions ahead. In the American Catholic Church is the emphasis on American or on Catholic? In their analysis it seems the emphasis is on “American.” The pervasive American culture funnels all of the major religious denominations into its cultural mix. There are some variations on certain moral issues (abortion), some on liturgy (priesthood or not) but in many respects American culture is the shaper of Catholicism and all mainline religions in America, not vice versa. Each of the three areas mentioned above can see conflicts coming between these two poles.

Roof and McKinney see the following trends in both mainline Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church: decline of liberal faith, increase of conservatives, growing secularism, religious individualism, and a new volunteerism (choose your own faith). For them pluralism has a danger: “an expanded pluralism in which there is less of a religiously grounded moral basis for society.”<sup>5</sup>

Religious individualism leaves too much up to the individual and dismantles a community. “Freedom” as an American hallmark can be detrimental to Church. You simply go where you want to go and leave your roots and your previous religious family. There is less commitment to the faith and religion of your birth. Family life has been weakened and this affects church. Religious values, often transmitted by the family, are more difficult to find.

The Archdiocese of Boston suggests that Sunday mass attendance rates fall by about 2% per year and have been doing so in a fairly steady

pace in each of the past eight years. Yet Catholics have increased the farthest in white-collar jobs from 1957 (29%) to 1975 (48%). This is the biggest increase among any religious group in the United States and is still continuing today. There is tremendous growth in income, prestige, status, education and incorporation into American life. Catholics are not on the periphery of American life; they are in the very center of it. "Today Catholics generally resemble moderate Protestants in their socioeconomic profile," Roof and McKinney write, "each group contains about equal proportions of persons who are better educated, employed in the higher-paying occupations, and say they consider themselves members of the higher-ranking classes."<sup>6</sup>

T Howland Sanks picks up on the phrase 'better educated' in his book *Salt, Leaven and Light*. He suggests three consequences of better-educated Catholics in the United States: "fundamental basis of attitudinal divergence in American culture," greater freedom to criticize and disagree with ecclesiastical authorities, and the impact on priests and religious women.<sup>7</sup> We are seeing all three of these statements come true. The more education people have the more they are inclined to think on their own and go in other directions from authority. The impact on priests and religious is seen in their own individual thinking and their departure from religious life.

While the national average for those switching among religions is forty percent, among Catholics it is only fifteen percent.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as Andrew Greeley points out, the number of Catholics who "go their own way" is increasing, especially among the young.

"Confusion over moral issues has also been a recurring reality since Vatican II in the United States as elsewhere. This includes general questions like the role of conscience, the church's teaching authority with regard to morality, and the limits of dissent, as well as issues pertaining to specific moral norms."<sup>9</sup>

*We need to be more public as a Church  
and work and live from a tradition that is Catholic.*

J Brian Hehir writing in Church magazine affirms this view. We are "not in possession of a structured vision of life and work rooted in the Catholic moral and social tradition."<sup>10</sup> Hehir claims that though Church has the documents for pointing us in the right direction (eg, *Pacem In Terris*), we have not grasped it as an American Church. We need to be more public as a Church and work and live from a tradition that is Catholic. Both Greeley and Hehir argue for more public connections between the "American" and "Catholic" pieces of Church.

In *The Catholic Moment*, Richard John Neuhaus, a Lutheran priest who became a Catholic priest, writes that now is the time for the Catholic Church to exert its moral and political leadership and become the public Church that it is called to be. In calling for the Church to challenge secularism, Neuhaus claims that no other organization in the world speaks with such authority and history as does the Catholic Church, and now is the time for it to become more public since it has become more mainstream.<sup>11</sup> Although he may not know of Precious Blood spirituality, I suggest it would have a place here.

### **Religious Liberty: An Uneasy Partnership**

**F**or many the relationship between ‘American’ and ‘Catholic’ is an uneasy partnership; they are just so very different in function and essence. The Catholic influence on American life is not as large as the American influence on Catholic life. Sometimes Americans are caught in-between the Roman way of doing things (from top down) and the American way of doing things (by vote or consensus).

Reflecting on this uneasy partnership in the context of religious liberty, Glen Olsen points out that in the United States, liberty emphasizes the right to worship as one chooses and that governments should not be neutral in this enterprise but are “to help create conditions favorable to the fostering of religious life.”<sup>12</sup> Olsen understands the Constitution to be neutral but feels that at times the United States government is more anti-church than pro-church. He laments the end of the public face of Church in favor of privatized religion and feels the many Catholic, ethnic, social and political groups are on a fast track to extinction. The American Catholic used to stress the noun Catholic and now emphasizes the adjective American.

There seems to be general consensus about the history of the Catholic Church in America since 1960. Few will deny that the number of those attending mass each week is down, the number of priests and sisters is down, number of total Catholics is up, number of Catholic schools is down, the number of those in Catholic colleges and

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universities is up, though the number of these colleges is down. “The Catholic community, perhaps more than any other religious community in the United States, experienced the combined and simultaneously stimulating and disintegrating hurricane winds of social and religious reforms and upheavals that blew across the country in the 1960s

and early 1970s,” author Patrick W. Carey writes. “The implementation of the Second Vatican Council’s liturgical and structural reforms and the corresponding transformation of American Catholic consciousness that accompanied them took place at a time of revolutionary change in American political and cultural life.”<sup>13</sup>

Kenneth Schmitz adds: “For the Catholic who is American, then, the quest becomes: to find an order among these ordered liberties.”<sup>14</sup> Which is more important than the other and who do I wish to be?

The Declaration on Religious Freedom from Vatican II was a particular American contribution to the council that emphasized two key points. First, it accepted the American principle of separation of church and state. People should be free to make a religious choice following their own conscience and should not be forced in matters of faith. Secondly, according to Avery Dulles, “Vatican II brought about a wider distribution of power by giving all bishops a share in the supreme government of the Church rather than allowing them to be perceived as mere deputies of the pope.”<sup>15</sup>

Dulles suggests this second issue has fallen on hard times recently. He feels that American Catholics espoused more liberal themes and in many respects won the day at Vatican II. They were pleased with the council; a breath of fresh air had happened. The American Catholic Church was felt in Rome. But more recently a somewhat unexpected conservative backlash has occurred. Liturgical changes were the biggest early beneficiary from the council; now some of those changes are being “recalled.” The progressive American Church after Vatican II is giving way to more conservative voices now.

*The Church  
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### **A Mixed Marriage: Church and Culture**

**T**he Church is defensive about American culture yet revels in it. “Today there are many different ways that Catholics understand their ecclesial identity,” Richard G. Cote writes. “The once-clear boundaries for assessing Catholic identity now seem problematic and less trustworthy, and to a growing number, they belong to another age. Already in 1989, for example, seventy percent of Catholics in the country believed that one could be a good Catholic without going to Church every Sunday; sixty-eight percent said one could be a good Catholic without obeying the Church’s teaching on birth control. This has given rise to what Andrew Greeley has termed ‘the communal

Catholics,' and what Karl Rahner has described as 'incomplete identification' with the institutional church."<sup>16</sup>

Cote sees three new criteria replacing the sacramental model of the immigrant church: using the American cultural context rather than a transposed European model; use of faithful dissent from church teachings; and a new sense of relating the private dimension of church with the public dimension. More people are seeing religion as private rather than public. This will allow the total number of Catholics to continue to rise, while the number of 'occasional' Catholics also continues to rise. The number of genuinely committed Catholics will probably not be rising. "At no time in its mission history has the church ever given itself new criteria for Christian identity independently of the socio-cultural context in which the faithful are called to live and exercise their mission," Cote writes.<sup>17</sup>

Faith and culture are always intertwined. This is always a mixed blessing. There will always be the need to pick and choose from a culture. Faith is always localized in the world, in a culture, and so it is impossible to divorce the one from the other. When we try to do so we end by harming both. Faith can always enliven and enrich a local culture, but the culture can learn from faith on how to be a better culture. Faith must have the goal of enriching culture and not be simply compatible with it or parallel to it; they must meet every day. Church must do more than put up with culture; it must embrace it, but not all of

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it. The Church must also be critical of the local culture.

Cote uses the image of marriage to discuss the Church and inculturation. He sees culture as an equal partner with the Church. The Church is not to be the dominant partner or more equal than the culture. Cote understands that sometimes more of the partnership falls on one more than the other, but that in the long run it is a good 'marriage' for both.

Marriage as metaphor here sees the

Church and culture as going down a new road not traveled before. Mistakes will be made. There is always the possibility for divorce, but yet once the marriage is made it should go forward.

Marriage is a fascinating image to use in seeing the intersection of Catholic and American. Cote's principal theological foundation for this image is the incarnation, the Son of God becoming human. For Cote the incarnation provides the theological base for marriage between culture and the Church. "The principal agent or cause behind Jesus'

capacity to redeem—in everything he does, endures or suffers—is precisely the very dynamic of his being incarnate,” Cote writes.<sup>18</sup> The Church should live in the world in order to redeem the world. Jesus continues to live in the Church, which should continue to live in the world in order to redeem and save it. This theological foundation is certainly a strong one and one at the heart of Catholic belief. In the incarnation two worlds are joined; in marriage two people are joined. Cote is looking for equality in the relationship between the ‘Catholic’ piece and the ‘American’ piece of Church.

### **Redemptive Initiatives**

**M**onica Hellwig expands on this image of marriage and where we are going as an American Catholic Church. “The interaction of the pluralistic American culture with the Catholic heritage is not and cannot be blueprinted beforehand,” she writes. “It emerges as the product of interaction of free, creative, agents choosing their associations, their emphases, their questions, their commitments of energy and time, and so forth. We do make our own history, though we do not make it any way we choose but within the limits and possibilities of the situation, which has been shaped not directly by the divine creator but very largely by those who went before us.”<sup>19</sup>

Hellwig offers five positive aspects of American culture “to offer redemptive initiatives” for Catholics and five negative ones that call for transformation. On her positive list:

- *Optimistic spirit of enterprise.* We are interested in invention, investment, economic and technical development. The book of Genesis emphasizes the goodness of creation and we do also.
- *A legal system borrowed from British common law instead of Roman law.* No one person is ever in charge; all are equal before the law. We have due process and trial by jury.
- *Moving from religious freedom to freedom of personal morality.* This area concerns the individual. Freedom of speech, assembly, and opinion are important for Americans. There are strong implications for authority, the role of the magisterium and the local ordinary here.
- *Freedom of the press, assembly, academic freedom, freedom of speech without reprisal.* Again the role of authority is important here. This area concerns communities and groups, not individuals.
- *American experience of democracy.* We value the principle of subsidiarity. Government on the local level is important.

On the negative side, Hellwig offers these features of life in the United States:

- *Prevalent individualism.*
- *Wealth of Americans.* We define someone by their earning power.
- *American intervention in the affairs of almost every other country.* We are too aggressive in foreign policy.
- *Our eagerness to reduce complicated issues to public relations or a 'sound bite' on television.* We are guilty of style over substance.
- *To forget history and live on a whim.* Only the present matters for many Americans. There is little sense of the eternal.

*The strengths of the Church, especially its larger view of world, can be a helpful corrective to the narrowness of America.*

The American Catholic Church can learn from the first five and assist America in the second five. Hellwig offers a major new direction for our Church. There is reciprocity here, as she wants the conversation to go both ways, from Church to America and from America to Church. The strengths of the Church, especially its larger view of world, can be a helpful

corrective to the narrowness of America. The new directions are in mutuality, support and learning from the other, rather than in seeing the other in a 'conversion' mentality or in general mistrust. The strengths of America can make American culture and values more a part of Church life while the strengths of Church life can assist America.

### **A Large Embrace: Incarnation and Transcendence**

**A**t one time there was really only one way of being Catholic, and that was to go to Church on Sunday and receive the sacraments regularly. This is not true today. Some people go only on occasion and call themselves Catholic. They can dissent from Church teaching and call themselves Catholic. They can marry outside the Church yet remain inside. There is more than one way to be Catholic.

The contributions of the Catholic Church to American life can be substantial; the contributions of America to the Catholic Church can also be substantial. The 2004 presidential elections have dealt with some of these issues. Both candidates seem to be men of faith, but both also have weaknesses: Kerry wants to keep his religious faith in the background (unwise in my opinion) and Bush wants to hit us over the



head with it (also unwise).

A spirituality that insists on the incarnation while believing that faith transcends culture can assist us in seeing through the challenges of being a Catholic American and an American Catholic. Robert Schreiter affirms it takes both the local culture and the importance of Church to

realize fully the potential of the gospel. “Church is a complex of those cultural patterns in which the gospel has taken on flesh,” Schreiter writes, “at once enmeshed in the local situation, extending through communities in our own time and in the past, and reaching out to the eschatological realization of the fullness of God’s reign. There is no local theology without the local church, that concrete community of Christians, united through word and sacrament in the one Lord.

“Culture is the concrete context in which this happens,” Schreiter continues. “It represents a way of life for a given time and place, replete with values, symbols, and meanings, reaching out with hopes and dreams, often struggling for a better world. Without a sensitivity to the cultural context, a church and its theology either become a vehicle for outside domination or lapse into docetism, as though its Lord never became flesh.”<sup>20</sup>

The Church has no choice but to embrace the local culture but the question is, “How big is the embrace?” Richard Neuhaus, for one, is looking for a large embrace. “If and when Catholicism becomes like everybody else, one more church among the churches, one more option in the cafeteria of spiritual styles, then it has not only lost its own identity, but it has contributed little to American culture or to the life of the larger church,” he writes. “For its own sake, and for the sake of all of us, the challenge of Catholicism is to demonstrate a new model of ecclesiastical vitality and integrity within the American context. If it is to make such a difference, one expects it will have to be as determinedly Roman Catholic as it is thoroughly American.”<sup>21</sup>

The American Catholic Church is the Church of Dorothy Day and Mother Angelica, of the National Catholic Register and the National Catholic Reporter, and could be a model for other national churches. Precious Blood spirituality that stresses the incarnation can assist us in seeing the contributions of both, so that our faith may be strong and our country a part of the great Kingdom of Jesus.

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## Notes

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- 21 Neuhaus, p. 263.



## For Reflection

- The author asserts the American culture has more influence on the American Church than vice-versa. Do you agree with this assessment? In what ways has the church influenced the American culture?
  
- Richard Cotes uses the metaphor of marriage in examining the relationship between the Church and the culture. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this image?
  
- What image or metaphor would you use to capture the relationship between faith and culture?
  
- On what issues should the Church take a more public stance?



*Precious Blood Father James Urbanic developed an interest in the intersection of the church and culture as part of his study and work in evangelization. Ordained in 1971, he has served in parish and formation ministry. He is currently the provincial of the Kansas City Province.*

# Can American Culture Be Redeemed By the Blood of Jesus?

By Lucy Fuchs

Catholic Americans are often seen as a contradiction in terms. At one time, some wondered if Catholics really could be good Americans. The church was very slow to recognize a democracy as a legitimate form of government and it took the Second Vatican Council to officially recognize freedom of religion as a human right. In the not too distant past, Americans were suspicious of Catholics since we were subject to a pope, a foreign ruler. During the campaign of 1960, John F. Kennedy was forced to go on record that he would not defy the American constitution to support his church. Today Catholics politicians have to prove that they can be both Catholic and American. But I am not as concerned about Catholics being subject to a pope as I am about Catholics being subject to the Jesus of the Gospels. Our whole American culture often seems to support anything but Christian values, in spite of the efforts of some to equate them. When people say that the United States is a “Christian” country, I would challenge them to show if and how this is true.

Frequently in recent years there have been politicians who claim they are “Christian” and say they support family values. But it is never clear which family values they support. They say they believe in families, but woe to their children if they choose a lifestyle different from that of their parents. Or perhaps they are anti-abortion. But the really radical teachings of the New Testament are frequently ignored. In this essay, I discuss three aspects of American culture that seem to be at crossroads to the message of Jesus: attitude toward material things, individuality versus community, and suffering and death.

## Attitude Toward Material Things

Americans, both Catholic and otherwise, are often caught up in material things. Yet in the first beatitude Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Now a lot of effort has been exerted to show that Jesus did not tell us that the poor were blessed. Some say that being poor in spirit is not being poor, but detached. Others point out that Jesus was really turning the values of his people upside down, because people then, like people today, believed that being poor was not in any way a blessed condition. In fact, as one reads the Psalms, for example, one gets the impression that poverty is a sign of disfavor with God. This is a Calvinistic aspect also, and a strong part of the American psyche. If people are poor, it is thought, they are somehow morally deficient. Perhaps they are lazy or in other ways incompetent. And so the poor are despised in this country. The officials of the city of Tampa near where I live have determined that charitable groups may not give out food to the homeless in some parts of town; the local residents do not want to see those homeless people.

Even religious people are filled with the idea of wealth as good. Affluent parishes consider themselves blessed by God and they often adorn their churches, adding more and more gilt and gold. After all, they say, this is God's house, why not the best for God?

And when they do adopt a parish to help, they would much rather adopt a parish in the Dominican Republic or India or Ghana, somewhere away from us in another country. Not too close, please.

In their personal lives, many people are generous about giving money and donating time. But both of these are usually what is left over, it is rare to find anyone who gives to the poor rather than buy a new car. Or decides to forego even a single new garment in order to

*Not only do we not set aside our wealth but we even seem to think that we must have whatever is new, more convenient, and even with the right labels.*

contribute. But Jesus even told the rich young man to sell all that he had and give to the poor.

Not only do we not set aside our wealth but we even seem to think that we must have whatever is new, more convenient, and even with the right labels.

Here the message of Jesus is much stronger than that of our church that appears to many as quite rich and materialistic too. One need only look at the palaces that some church prelates live in or even the well-furnished homes of the priests and their well-provisioned tables. Not that the laity are

better. We are all infected with American materialism.

It seems that it is time for all of us to examine seriously what Jesus meant about it being very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.

## **Individuality vs. Community**

**A**merican culture is based on a strong concept of individualism, an idea that we must do whatever we choose to do and that we can do it by ourselves. Some of this comes from the American Revolution that maintained our rejection of oppressive authority. Some of it comes from the westward expansion where there was literally no one to help and if you could not make it on your own you would not make it.

*Our family homes are often not much more than a place to sleep and get something to eat.*

This trait of individualism is found everywhere in our culture. Our very young children are loved and cared for, but they quickly are expected to do things themselves. And we have disdain for those who cannot. Our family homes are often not much more than a place to sleep and get something to eat. Teenagers tell their parents they are going out; they do not ask to do so and do not see any reason to tell their parents where they are going. Even husbands and wives are anxious to not let each other make too many demands.

Our decisions are made by how it will benefit us. Parents may well think of their children and their whole family unit when major decisions such as where to live or what kind of work to do, but often each individual thinks just of himself or herself.

Even in the Catholic Church, we have often been infected with individualism, with a “Jesus and me” spirituality. We might like to go to Mass, but we would rather not mix with some of those others who go there.

Yet the Catholic Church is not just a big organization, a well organized company. It is meant to be a community. Now obviously it would be hard to be a community with a billion or more other people. But we need community within our churches. We need to get back to at least a little of what existed in the first Christian communities as portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles. Some parishes have established small Christian communities and these make attempts to look after each other, to care about each other, and to love one another.

St. Paul said that the church is the Body of Christ and one member cannot say to another member, "I do not need you." Each part is needed and valuable.

Further we Catholics believe in the communion of saints; it is part of what we recite in the Nicene Creed. By this we mean that we are connected to the church everywhere on earth and in heaven. We don't seek and find the kingdom on our own.

But we need also to be a part of the larger community that will include both Catholics and others. The United States itself needs to be concerned with the larger world community. It should be distressing to Catholics that often our country chooses to go it alone and not work with other countries. Or we close our eyes to suffering or starving in other parts of the world. As a community we cannot do this. Community is an important aspect of a Catholic's life.

### **Suffering and Death**

**O**ur country is drenched in blood. Every day babies are aborted. Every day someone is being abused. Every day American soldiers are killing or being killed. Almost every week someone in one of our prisons is being executed.

Our television shows are getting more and more violent. Even the Saturday morning shows for children are shot through with violence.

*It is as if  
we relish blood  
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as though death  
is only an imaginary entity.*

The only difference is that the "good guy" usually wins in children's programs. Not so in adult movies. And for those who play video games or are involved in interactive television, the situation is even worse. There the viewer gets to be the person who does the shooting and killing or exploding of other human beings.

And yet we are so squeamish. News shows carefully avoid showing dead bodies or actual killing, even during wars. People say things like "I faint at the sight of blood." And people don't really want to see real death or real blood. Funeral homes are made as gentle and pleasant as possible so that we do not have to face up to death. It is as if we relish blood only in the abstract, as though death is only an imaginary entity.

We are also a drug-drenched culture that we cannot endure any pain any time. We must immediately take some medication. One well-known advertisement sings, "I don't have time for the pain."

And yet we seem to inflict pain on others. Behavior in our prisons

is often contrary to human rights requirements. Behavior in war prison camps is often contrary to the spirit of the Geneva conventions. We all want to live easy, comfortable, and painless lives and at the same time follow a Jesus who had nowhere to lay his head and who wore a crown of thorns. There is something out of line here.

### **Can America be redeemed?**

**A**merica is a country in need of a great deal of healing and redeeming. What we consider our greatest strengths are often our greatest weaknesses: our wealth, independence, and easy life. These qualities are not bad in themselves, but they have a way of closing our minds and hearts to the suffering and pain of the world, as well as keeping us from Jesus himself.

*Our wealth has made us selfish and often arrogant. Jesus would teach us to be poor and humble.*

Our wealth has made us selfish and often arrogant. Jesus would teach us to be poor and humble. Our independence has made us disregard the call of God to serve him in serving others. Our easy lives have shielded us from seeing the pain of others.

Our church is often guilty of many of these same defects. After all, the church is made up of weak and failing human beings. Deeply religious people can also forget Jesus' message or concentrate on the parts of the Gospels that are easier to follow. But, as has been often noted, it is the hard sayings of Jesus that are likely to be those that are authentic.

And yet, the Spirit continually guides the church. Whenever they are needed, great souls arise. Gaspar del Buffalo came along when he was needed, as did Ignatius, Francis, Mother Cabrini, Dorothy Day, and Mother Teresa. Each of them called the people back to God.

The social teachings of the church, sometimes called the best-kept secrets of the church, talk about our responsibilities to the world. Once when I was present at an RCIA class while these were being discussed, it was some of the sponsors who were most incredulous. "Why are these never preached?" they asked.

Why indeed.

Because it seems clear that our country needs a strong Catholic influence. I am not speaking here of condemning abortion or gay marriage or urging school prayer or putting up the Ten Commandments. I am speaking of a community within the larger American community which truly believes in Jesus' words of loving God and neighbor, of

dying that others might live, of suffering for the sake of others.

Would it not be wonderful for our church and our nation if the Catholic Church truly represented Jesus' message. If one could say that Catholics have a true gospel sense of values related to wealth and property. If one could say that to be a Catholic is to be part of a community in which all members are united in body and soul so that observers can say, "See how they love one another." If one could say that Catholics have so deeply imbibed the message of the redemptive suffering of Jesus that they will willingly accept blows, but never inflict them.

Then I believe that Catholics can make the difference in the United States of America.



### For Reflection

- Do you believe that Catholics have had an influence on Christianity in our country or are Catholics just like everyone else?
- Which of the three aspects listed here seems to you to be most significant?
- Are there are other aspects of the gospel message that are clearly opposed to American culture?
- How well do you think the Catholic church itself lives up to the Gospel message?



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## Walking on a Precipice

Being Catholic in America today  
Is like walking on a precipice  
Clinging to the mountain side  
While peering into deep ravines  
That threaten equilibrium, I'd say

But oh that mountain firm and high  
That's God, my very strength  
Upon Whose arm I lean and cling  
With every breath, and I am sure  
The road is safe and every step secure.

Because I see a cloud above  
Advancing near to me, no sham;  
A blood red hue enfolding me  
With safe bright wings of love.  
God finds me where I am.

Oh Precious Blood my life divine  
I listen to Your breathing, bent;  
And pounding deep within my heart  
Your hopes and dreams You whisper,  
"Would you become my instrument?"

**-Mary Anne Schiller, CPPS**

*Mary Anne Schiller is a Sister of the Precious Blood  
from Dayton, Ohio.*

# Wounded But Ever Faithful

**By Daniel Torson, CPPS**

**T**he traditional recording and recounting of history typically contains the deeds of famous people, the triumphs of war, scientific and architectural achievements, and movements of peoples, corporations, and governments. While this approach provides a valid approach to the realities of the past, it is written from the perspective of those in power, those with education, and those with authority. Missing from this approach are the perspectives of those whose deeds are not particularly extraordinary but rather seek to find meaning in life from the middle or fringes of society.

Modern attempts in historical studies seek to include the voices of those that the mainstream of society has judged as insignificant. For the modern historian the voices of those that have seemingly disappeared with the passing centuries have become a major focus in presenting a history that is truly representative of the broader spectrum of society.

In addressing the topic of American and Catholic, this brief essay seeks to give voice to one segment of American Catholic society that is usually not included in any triumphant presentation on this topic. These are the people that I frequently meet in pastoral ministry. They are the people who are seeking a compassionate listener and a validation of their personal history within the Catholic Church in America. This group of people shares one common trait: they have been wounded by the institutional Church but because of their strong, Catholic familial tradition and faith have freely chosen to remain at the center of life in the Church. Some of these faithful people, in spite of being wounded, have chosen to continue in roles of lay leadership for forty or fifty years. As pastors come and go, some of these dedicated Catholics have truly become the pillars of their local parishes.

One such story is the story of my own parents and family.

For forty-eight years my parents have dedicated themselves to our small parish of the rural, American heartland in which I was reared. Throughout this period of years they have served on every committee, been a part of every parish organization, and were major forces in two

building projects. In a rural parish, this even means doing some of the actual building. For them this is simply what it means to be a Catholic. This is the way that our family has lived and worshipped in this country ever since our grandparents immigrated to the United States from Poland more than a hundred years ago. Being Catholic is as much a part of our heritage as being American and Polish. There is simply no distinction between these three identities of life.

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In the spring of 1997, the bishop of the diocese where my parents live had gotten into a power struggle with members of the group, "Call to Action." Not only did he determine the necessity of banning the group within the diocese, but also proceeded to excommunicate members of this group, along with Catholics who were part of various other unrelated groups such as the Masons. In rural America, Call to Action does not have a significant membership, but the Masons are certainly a group with prestige. Protestants greatly outnumber the Catholics and ecumenical relations are a high priority. I distinctly remember my mother's Protestant friends who were also active with the Masons asking, "Why does your bishop hate us?" Embarrassed and angry with the bishop, she could barely face her friends during the months that this battle of power was waged in the Church and the secular media. When the media attention subsided, life in the small town returned to normal, but the wounds remained.

A few years after this incident another crisis was faced in our parish. The pastor who was widely respected began to exhibit signs of severe mental illness. His erratic behavior and sudden fits of anger became more frequent. My parents often received the brunt of his fervor, as they were active in parish life. As many parishioners became concerned, neighboring priests were consulted about the health of our pastor. The dean of the area was even consulted. None of the priests felt that they were in any position to assist since the bishop alone handles such matters.

Finally a group of parishioners including my parents met with the bishop. He received them, but by the end of the meeting the bishop made the group guilty for reporting their pastor to the bishop. The parish group left the meeting stunned and wounded. The pastor was quietly removed within a week with no dialogue, explanation, or

apology. The subject was never again mentioned on any official level, but deep wounds remained within the hearts of the loyal parishioners.

Lastly, just within the past six months, my brother's fiancé decided to begin the process of annulment for her previous marriage. She had meetings with six priests before the seventh priest finally agreed to sponsor her case. Since she was in the process of moving the major concern of the clergy was the proper domicile and the proper functioning of the case. Compassion was not the primary concern. The seventh priest has thus far been generous in his assistance.

After the series of these tragic abuses of power within the Church, I have asked myself, "Why do I remain within the Church?" But just as quickly as the question is asked, my answer is immediately reaffirmed. It is because of my faith in Jesus Christ and my love for the Church as a whole. Any thoughts of leaving are never serious. My family is American, Catholic, and Polish. These identities will never be separated.

These reflections were intended to give voice to one group within the American Catholic Church. With the recent scandals of clergy

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abuse, I suspect that this group is growing. The real tragedy is that the pain remains long after the controversy of the events has ended. Similarly, the discussion concerning the clergy scandals has subsided but the pain remains in the hearts of many faithful Catholics.

As a member of the Precious Blood Community I have become more dedicated to the ministry of compassion and reconciliation in my daily life. The use of power not only within the Church but also within the many facets of American life deserves our careful attention. The abuse of power is damaging beyond our immediate perceptions. We who serve in leadership capacities both within the Church and secular society are challenged by the Gospel to address these abuses and lead in the service of the many.



## For Reflection

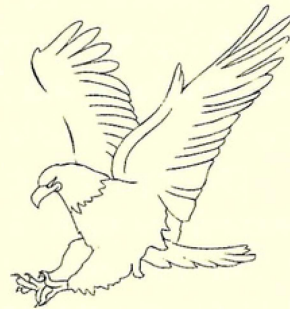
- How do you incorporate a Gospel understanding of “power” within the various leadership roles of your life?
- What aspects of the Church stimulate your faithfulness in light of the challenges within the Church?



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## Peace



## Freedom

## Reconciliation



# The Charism of the Moment

By Al O'Dell

**B**efore attempting to offer an answer to the question, "What does it mean to be Catholic in America," it will be necessary to say briefly what one means by "catholic." It will also be necessary to say how one perceives the "America" in which one is to be catholic.

Catholic is understood here in its root meaning of universal, "according to the whole." It is an attitude of welcoming openness to the whole of reality, to its redeemed and redemptive potential. The roots of what it means to be "catholic" are found in the book of Genesis: "God saw all that he had made and indeed it was very good (Gen 1, 31)." It finds reinforcement in the words of Jesus, "I have come so that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10,10)."

This idea of catholic sees the world and all that is in it as a fundamental unity. It is a unity based on the creative and sustaining love of God, and on the divine's irrevocable and restorative love made fully and humanly present in the life of Jesus Christ. It is a unity that is both gift and task. Short of eschatological fulfillment in Christ, it is always a work in progress. It is the "already" and "not yet" of the kingdom of God established in Jesus. This is the field of labor, the context of

mission, for one who wants to be catholic.

*For those who see  
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Precious Blood of Jesus,  
this is the love that,  
in our own limited way,  
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and through our own  
individual charism  
and mission.*

How one understands catholic becomes an inner dynamic in whatever one says about the triad of spirituality, charism, and mission. While these three words may be conceptually distinct, in reality they interpenetrate and nourish each other. A personal spirituality is the context in which we give ourselves over to God's embrace. It is the position from which God, in and through us, embraces that part of the

world we touch. Ours is a spirituality of the Precious Blood. The Precious Blood of Jesus is a real, historical expression of a divine/human love that is without measure, that is irrevocable, and a love that does not presuppose goodness for its existence, but rather brings fourth goodness. For those who see the world through the Precious Blood of Jesus, this is the love that, in our own limited way, we are to emulate in and through our own individual charism and mission.

Each one's individual charism is discovered anew each day in the give and take of the historical moment that is the raw material for our mission. It is what one might call "the charism of the moment." For some, their charism may be very visible; for others, perhaps most, their charism will be hidden in the ordinariness of the moment. It responds to the question: How do I allow God, through me, to bring a little bit of the kingdom—a kingdom of justice and peace, a kingdom of compassion and preferential concern for the marginalized—to this concrete historical situation confronting me now? What are its challenges and opportunities? The charism of the moment is discovered in the demands of the moment, the mission.

St. Paul reminds us (I Corinthians 12 & 13) of two very important truths about charisms. First, all charisms are for the benefit of the community, for the building up of the kingdom of God. All gifts are gifts for the other. Secondly, without love, all charisms, be they the rather public and visible ones, or the charism of the moment, are sterile.

Of course, we all know from experience and reflection how easy it is to miss the opportunities and challenges of the moment. It requires a certain inner quiet, and a willingness to forget oneself and one's projects. I recall exiting St. Charles Seminary after a meeting. It was winter. I saw someone who had been at the meeting attempting, with some difficulty, to remove ice from the windshield of her car. I had time and a scraper, but was also focusing not on the moment but on where I wanted to be next. Away I drove. I can only hope the individual did not have too much trouble removing the ice from her windshield.

This is not small stuff. "The sins and selfishness of one generation become the inhibiting conditions of the next," Richard McCormick wrote. This is true not only of the march of history; it is true of the spiritual journey of each one of us, of the individual choices we make.

There are some attitudes that might be helpful in making it less likely that we miss the redemptive opportunities of the moment. These attitudes are seen as important pre-conditions for being catholic. This list is not exhaustive. Other attitudes could surely be chosen. Hopefully, these might be useful for some. The four attitudes are: reverence, listening, seeking common ground and being prophetic.

## Reverence

**R**everence finds its ultimate roots in the immanence of God to all creatures. It is strengthened by the words of Jesus that whatever we do to others, we do to him (see Matthew 26,40). This reverence is a response to the truth that each of us is an expression of God's creative love. This is not a pious platitude but a deeply held conviction that the person in front of me is beloved of God, pursued every day, as the Psalmist tells us, by the goodness and kindness of God (Psalm 23, 6). In the historical moment, one way in which God's love

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touches this person is in the respect and reverence we have for them.

They are of value not because of what they can do, of whom they know, of what they can produce, but of what they are in the depths of their being, and of what they are chosen to be in the eyes of God.

But reverence does not mean simply finding or seeing God in creatures. This can lead to the creature being used simply as an instrument in our pursuit of God. It is rather attending to the fullness of the creature in God.

## Listening

**S**omeone has said that four things are required in order to listen: eyes to see the other, ears to hear the other, a butt to sit on, and a mouth to keep shut. The best part of that statement is its emphasis on the 'other'. Listening is an exercise of self-forgetfulness and other centeredness. We try, aware that the effort is never fully successful, to get into the skin of the other person, as God has gotten into our skin in the person of Jesus. We want to see their story with their eyes, feel with their heart its range of emotions. It is something we must do with our heart more than our ears. When we truly listen, we embrace the risk of having to change based on what has been heard.

## Seeking Common Ground

**S**o much discourse today at all levels (church, society, family) tends to get polarized. The opposition is demonized, accused of being ideological, or simply ignorant. Most of what we refer to euphemistically as political discourse is the nadir of this tendency. This polarization frequently results in what has been called a "dialogue of the



deaf.” Contemporary discussions of abortion, gay marriage, stem cell research, the death penalty, war, etc. reflect this unfortunate and debilitating tendency. We need to seek common ground around the

*We need to seek common ground  
around the issues that divide us.*

issues that divide us. Laws and policies in a pluralistic society will never completely satisfy everyone. We need to continue to struggle to discover that common ground on the issues that divide us, a common ground that will, in the current circumstances and in our best judgment, do the most to promote the good that we all espouse.

### **Be Prophetic**

**T**his attitude is critical for two reasons. First, it is important that ‘seeking common ground’ not be seen as a kind of mushy acquiescence to the lowest common denominator of agreement. This was surely not the intent of Cardinal Bernardin, who gave renewed emphasis and importance to the idea.

More basically, however, being prophetic is an absolutely necessary corollary of the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ of God’s kingdom, a kingdom that takes shape in and through a continuous succession of historical moments. This side of eschatological fulfillment in Christ, no human institution is above the need for improvement and change, no human institution is a perfect embodiment of God’s kingdom. This applies to our society, to its institutions, to our economic system, to our form of democracy and, yes, it applies equally to some of the institutions of our church. One might legitimately ask, for example, whether or not, from the halls of the curia through the diocesan chancery to the local parish, less emphasis on authority and status, with all its sometimes princely trappings, and more emphasis on service would be of great benefit not only to the church, but for the world in which she is to be the fully human and redemptive presence of a Christ who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life for the many (see Mk 10, 45). Prophetic unrest will keep us sensitive to the reality of sin, both personal and structural, and to the abiding need for the ongoing redemption of the world and all that is in it.

## Conclusion

In his book, *The Language of Faith*, Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx writes, “For the Christian... the world and human history are as it were inserted by God between us and himself as a translation of his inner address, as the medium in and through which man’s attention is explicitly drawn to this inner speaking and finally as the space within which man can respond, in his life, to this invitation (p. 189).” Thomas Merton echoes this belief and captures what I have been trying to say when he writes in *The Inner Experience*, “One is content to have good motives and not be too anxious about making mistakes. In this way, one can swim with the living stream of life and remain at every moment in contact with God, in the hiddenness and ordinariness of the present moment with its obvious task (p. 66).”



## For Reflection

- Who are the people to whom I find it most difficult to listen, and why?
  
- What are the issues (or issue) where I find it most difficult to seek common ground, and why?
  
- When I think I am being prophetic, am I simply failing to hear the elements of truth in the position of another?
  
- Do I truly respond to the other in front of me, or are they simply an occasion for my perceived practice of virtue?



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# American Catholic

By Ernest Ranly, CPPS

**W**riting from Peru, South America, in 2004, I come to the question of what it means to be Catholic in America from distinctive perspectives. After more than 30 years in Latin America I chafe at the use of the word *America* to refer only to the United States. We are the United States of North America. But it is futile to rage against a living language that allows slang and colloquialisms to pass as acceptable speech. So in this essay, against my own sensibilities, *America* refers to the United States.

Humans—and Catholics—live inculturated lives at a precise moment of history. There is no such thing as a pure, abstract Catholic. There are Irish Catholics, Italian Catholics—and American Catholics (and, perhaps, Hispanic Catholics who live in America.) In this broad sense, we cannot be otherwise except American Catholics. Our liturgies, our language, our social outreach, our generosity is distinctively American. The Vatican project in convening a Synod of America with its subsequent document trying to impose the geographical entity upon all of North and South America as if it were a social/cultural unity has proven to be non-functional. In this broad sense, we cannot be otherwise except American Catholics and American Catholics at this point of history

I watch my grand nephews/nieces enter into a family social setting, saying: “Hi, guys! Hey, this is really sexy!” Then I know that their social/language world is not mine. And I ask myself: “Is their Catholicism mine?”

I think one major question since September 11, 2001: what does it mean to be American today? The official political rhetoric of the past three years is changing what it means to be American. For example, patriotic language is taking on a style of religious language that tends to be severely exclusive. To be American means to be religious in a distinctively American (Christian) way.

Samuel Huntington is a scholar of high rank and prestige. In his recent book *Who Are We? The Challenge to America's Identity*, he

declares that America is “a distinct culture including the English language, Protestant values, individualism, religious commitment and respect for law.” A columnist for Lima’s major paper, *El Comercio*, has noted Huntington’s opposition against “Hispanization.”

There is no “Americano” dream. There is only the American dream, created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican-Americans will share in that dream and in that society only if they dream in English. The “melting pot” has become again one pure element: the classical WASP: white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant.

A Catholic signed the Declaration of Independence. Two Catholics were at the Constitutional Convention. Throughout the 19th century

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Catholic leaders such as Cardinal James Gibbons and Archbishop John Ireland had to re-affirm the dual loyalties of American Catholics to “One Church and One Country.” While Vatican authorities feared “Americanism” as a threat to the ideal that the state should promote only the one true faith, the controversy eventually dissolved itself in favor of that American Church which became the largest financial support for Rome. Through two World Wars and John Kennedy’s presidency American Catholics proved their unswerving patriotism.

Yet, like apple pie, American Catholic is a delicately cultivated dish. Charles R. Morris’ 1997 book on the history of the American Catholic Church has the telling title: *American Catholic*. To be Catholic in America, to be an American and to be Catholic is to combine some very peculiar elements.

One extreme is to become so thoroughly assimilated into the American ethos that “Catholic” becomes only a social/cultural tag, as if some one prefers classical music to pop: “My neighbour and good friend is Catholic; she is still my neighbor and that is all there is to that.”

The other extreme is to become openly counter-cultural, much like the Mennonite/Amish. One’s social/cultural life, the way one dresses, what one eats is dictated by one’s religious tradition. In this case, adherents to a religious tradition live within a designated political area

but do not participate in its political/economic structures. They are willing to migrate into other areas to maintain their own lifestyle (as the Amish are wont to do.)

In our history there were many ethnic American Catholics who created enclosed communities with their own language groups, churches, schools, social activities, religious dress of sisters and priests which were generally counter-cultural. Since Vatican II and John Kennedy a ghetto Catholicism has largely disappeared. Now in 2004, what does American Catholic mean?

Morris' history of the American Catholic Church is focused too much on the ethnic/nationalistic foundations, especially his emphasis on the role of the Irish. We German Catholics (such as the CPPS) hardly receive mention.

What is more, there is no reference to

American Foreign Missions (Maryknoll) and the whole Latin American venture. Historically and culturally, in today's reality, American Catholic is much more complicated than what that 500-page book describes.

Through Robert Schreiter's groundbreaking work, inculturation has become a major element in recent mission theology. But in a cosmopolitan culture such as the United States, it is difficult to focus upon how Catholics in America remain Catholic while becoming inculturated into the dominant ethos. There is always the danger that total assimilation will result and nothing distinctively Catholic, nothing prophetic, remains. Baptism has its godfather, there are church weddings for formal photographs and we ask for stylistic funeral services. "Catholic" means the rites for being "hatched, matched and dispatched."

Briefly, I see American Catholic as a distinct reality and as a living challenge in three areas: liturgy, the civil/political, and in the new inter-religious dialogue.

*Since Vatican II  
and John Kennedy  
a ghetto Catholicism  
has largely disappeared.*

## Liturgy

Liturgy is the official public cult of any religion. Liturgy necessarily has its setting in a specific culture. In Catholic Christianity, the traditions of Temple worship, public songs (psalms), sacrifice, sacred meal with the elements of bread and wine are essential. But these elements, while historical and, in a sense, immutable, must be brought to life in a contemporary public setting.

Roman liturgists reluctantly concede to some African churches adaptations of the Latin Liturgy for cultural reasons, but Rome has

never acknowledged that maybe the United States, over the centuries, has a distinctive culture. Side-stepping over the WASP mentality, what is there about America? Music, movies, sports, space travel, TV series; literature, philosophy, religious traditions; its praise for open spaces but its great love for its cities; its peculiar sense of militaristic patriotism; its complicated inter-racial relations with Native Americans, African-Americans and now the many new complex ethnic groups. How can this peculiar “spirit” be incorporated into the Eucharistic Liturgy for the American Church?

Yet to date, Rome will not even allow America the rights to its own idiomatic linguistic expressions. Let the Liturgy become American, in its style of architecture, its music, in its many ethnic expressions. Let inculturation begin with Liturgy!

### **Civic/Political**

**S**ince Vatican II, the concept of religious freedom and how Catholics can live in a pluralistic secular/civil society has been quite well defined. But walking the walk has not been easy. On one hand, American Catholics must avoid being too American, too narrow-minded in their patriotism, too quick to identify national interests with those of God. Christian inculturation must always include a prophetic stand towards the dominant culture.

American Catholics must enter into the area of human rights and speak the universal human language of rights and values. Are American Catholics aware of the singular, obstinate position that the United States has taken in issues such as ecology, land mines, the death penalty, the World Criminal Court, pre-emptive attacks of war, refusal to abide by

*Christian inculturation must always include a prophetic stand towards the dominant culture.*

Security Council decisions of the United Nations, and most recently, the treatment of prisoners—just to name a few? In the profession of our Catholic faith, can American Catholics blindly follow the globalization of the world economy, American definitions of free trade and refuse to take

responsibility for the bitter consequences to over half of the world population living in dire poverty?

On the debate over the morality of the war on Iraq, some Catholics are reputed to have said: “The Pope? Who cares what the Pope says! The Pope is not even American!”

Abortion has become a major issue and rightly so. But Catholic moralists must re-assess the role and the intent of an essentialist

philosophy that presumes to describe a natural law ethics as universally binding upon the civil society and the state. New openings for dialogue must be found.

This is not the time and the place to dissect the complexity of the abortion debate. I only want to indicate the need for alternative strategies for those who live in a pluralistic secular society. One major question is how to influence and change public opinion and public practice. Should Catholics demand new laws, constitutional amendments, and new lawsuits? It seems obvious that first public opinion must change. And how can we change public opinion?

How and why has American society rejected smoking in public? This has come about primarily in a slow re-education process, at many levels, with general goodwill all around. The change in public attitude is a result of a completely new mindset about the danger of smoking. I keep asking myself if something similar could not be done to change the public attitude towards abortion, to the death penalty, to the protection of the environment, to support of the poor of the world, for medicines for AIDS victims.

In other words, Catholics of today cannot close in upon ourselves, with the truth we think we have and live within our own enclosed enclaves, where there is no abortion, where only validly married Catholics receive the sacraments, where voters vote only for "Catholic" politicians. American Catholics must re-define their prophetic role in a pluralistic civil society.

### **Inter-Religious Dialogue**

**C**hristian ecumenism is still far from its expressed goals. Since 9/11 there is a need for a new religious consciousness. But I fear that American Catholic is still very distant from Christian ecumenism.

I was Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, for the first semester of 2002. At the CPPS May Assembly in 2002 at Carthage, unprepared, I was asked to give an informal report of my experience. In describing my life at the Institute, I remarked how very much I felt at ease with a woman Anglican priest from Vancouver, Canada. She and I shared common pastoral concerns over the Sunday Eucharist, preparing homilies and motivating people into structured social outreach in our distinct parishes.

Later two or three fellow CPPS members took me aside to criticize my remarks. What a public scandal to talk openly about women priests! How utterly preposterous that such a woman could possibly contribute

to pastoral parochial programs.

I was at a loss to answer. Certainly American Catholic today must mean openness to Christian ecumenism. After 9/11, American Catholic must move into inter-religious dialogue. This is an altogether new challenge, a new necessity. Our attitude towards world religions such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and the vaguely religious cultures of Japan and China is a new serious challenge to all. It may be

*American Catholic today must mean openness to Christian ecumenism. After 9/11, American Catholic must move into inter-religious dialogue.*

shocking to hear Samuel Huntington talking about the 21st century wars of religion, but it is important that we take the new reality seriously.

First of all, we should note that our news media do not tell us the truth. CNN and generally all the media have a secular code that forbids them to define confrontations as “religious.” They will always define conflicts in economic, territorial or vaguely cultural/historical terms. What is the conflict about in former Yugoslavia, if not religious? East Timor, Indonesia, Northern Ireland, Palestine, Israel, Sudan, Chenyenia, the question of religious teaching in India and most of the divisions of Islam in Iraq and Iran are religious issues.

The world economy, our national states and the United Nations are the results of the modern world in which reason and science excluded all religions. With post-modernism there is a return of the religious. But our political/economic structures do not know how to deal with the religious element. We Catholics with our strong faith traditions should be able to understand that at the root of many conflicts are religious concerns. We Catholics should accept the challenge to analyse political/economic issues along with the religious. Not that we want to incite new religious hostilities. But we want to help others to see that religious beliefs are extremely important elements in people’s daily lives. “Not by bread alone!” In many conflicts, people do not want so much economic/territorial rights; they want the free expression of their religious traditions.

To raise the issue of religion, especially in the conflicts with Islamic elements, is a very delicate business in today’s political scene. But American Catholics must mature into their world role and begin to take seriously the complexities of inter-religious dialogue. In this we serve the Gospel message and the Church. At the same time, for all its ambiguities, we serve world peace and a better America. Today it is not “Our Church and Our Country;” it is our one common religious world.





## For Reflection

- After September 11, 2001: has being “American” changed? Has being “Catholic” changed? Has being “American Catholic” changed?
- Should American Catholics participate openly in structures such as the NGO’s (Non-Government Organizations) even when, within the broad scope of human rights, some of their policies violate Vatican defined moral positions?
- With our magazine subscriptions, the books we read, the groups we associate with, how can we come to understand better world religions, especially that of Islam?



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## I Have a Question...

What does it mean to be Catholic in America?  
Which America? South, Central, or North?

Should not non-Americans have a voice  
in the election of our leaders,  
especially if it determines whether war  
will be waged in their country?

Or whether they can sell their products to the U.S.?  
Or whether the U.S. exportations will destroy their market?

Catholic means universal,  
Not just as in "Roman" Catholic.  
The larger question  
is what does it mean to be Christian,  
a follower of Christ,  
in today's society?

For me it means  
to take a stand for justice,  
to defend the dignity of each person,  
to take responsibility for building  
that beautiful order of things  
which Jesus came to establish  
in his blood.

**Anita Fearday, ASC**

*Adorer of the Blood of Christ Anita Fearday directs the Health Clinic sponsored by her community in LaPaz, Bolivia. She also serves as vocation director for her congregation in Bolivia.*

# Freedom and Justice: Examining the Tensions between Apocalyptic America and Gasparian Catholicism

**By Keith Branson, CPPS**

**I**n discerning what it means to be Catholic in America, it is important to recognize how the American paradigm of state religiosity sets the standard for citizenship and how Catholicism and Gaspar's charism find themselves in basic conflict with that standard. The roots of Americanism go back to the European colonization of this land, and exposing those roots will help in comprehending tensions between Americanism and Catholicism. The strain of American self-vision that is the most incompatible with Catholicism is the view of America as the "City on the Hill," the New Jerusalem, and the viewpoint that America's struggle with its enemies is almost always a struggle between Good and Evil.

There are two icons of American secular religiosity that have been fairly consistent since the beginning: freedom and justice. The search for freedom brought millions of Europeans to North America over the past 500 years and continues to be the foundation of every American political and social movement. Freedom as it appears to be interpreted today is usually seen as the freedom of the individual to act autonomously. Justice is the other main icon: good is to be rewarded and evil is to be punished. If justice is not done, then the consequences are terrible. In light of these two icons, compromise seems an unwelcome solution, and is usually blamed when the icons of freedom or justice are greatly transgressed. These concepts find themselves in Catholic thought as well, but they are not identical to the American icons.

## Early America: Apocalyptic Overtones

*How beautiful for pilgrim feet,  
Whose stern, impassioned stress  
A throughfare for freedom beat  
Across the Wilderness!  
America! America!  
God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self control,  
Thy liberty in law.*

Katherine Bates

**W**hen we think about the first founders of the country, we don't usually think of the small group of people who landed on the Virginia shore as a commercial colony. We remember that small group of hardy souls that landed at Plymouth Rock to be able to practice their faith freely and whose stern determination saw them through the tough initial seasons to peace and prosperity, culminating in the feast of the first Thanksgiving they shared with the Native Americans, their neighbors. These people lived to work and worship, considering almost every kind of recreation frivolous; they even refused to celebrate Christmas. Six days they worked the land and the seventh day they rested and read Scripture. They felt that if they were faithful, God would bless them with prosperity.

Puritan theology, according to Paul D. Reuben, had five key focus points:

- Total Depravity: through Adam's fall, every human is born sinful.
- Unconditional Election: God "saves" those he wishes and only a few are selected for salvation.
- Limited Atonement: Jesus died for the chosen only, not for everyone.
- Irresistible Grace: God's grace is freely given; it cannot be earned or denied. Grace is defined as the saving and transfiguring power of God.
- Perseverance of the "saints": those elected by God have full power to interpret the will of God, and to live uprightly. If anyone rejects grace after feeling its power in his life, he will be going against the will of God—something impossible in Puritanism.

Alan Shucard adds to this list with five qualities he describes as the "Puritan legacy":

- The need for moral justification for private, public, and governmental acts.
- The Questing for Freedom: personal, political, economic, and social.

- The Puritan work ethic.
- Elegiac verse: morbid fascination with death.
- The city upon the hill: concept of manifest destiny

These last two legacies have apocalyptic overtones. It should be noted that Freedom in Puritan terms generally meant freedom from corrupting influences, whether it was the European cultures they left behind, the Native Americans they encountered, or dissenters who arose within their communities whom they expelled, such as Roger Williams. Justice was simple: following God's will for one's life, interpreted by the Elect. Notice that compromise has no function in this system; eventually outside influences diluted the theocracy it generated.

Apocalyptic language provided moral foundation for the Revolution and the Civil War. The icons of freedom and justice were consistent in both conflicts, and the right to punish wrongdoers or enemies of the people was also unquestioned, whether the enemy was Native American, Loyalist, Spanish, or the American South. The promised land was prosperity, rewarded by fidelity to the icons. Compromise was blamed for the great injustice of the early American Republic: many saw the Civil War as punishment for more than seventy-five years of compromise on the issue of slavery, which was an offense against Freedom.

## 2004: Apocalypse Now

*Trust and Obey  
for there's no other way  
to be happy in Jesus  
than to Trust and Obey*

John H. Sammis

**C**urrent apocalyptic language in American thought is probably best personified by the popular *Left Behind* series by Timothy LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. LaHaye captured the essence of his Scriptural hermeneutic in *Revelation Unveiled* by a quote from his mentor, David L. Cooper:

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seeks no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate text, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise.

The axiomatic truth is called *dispensationalism*, begun by John Darby in the 19th century, and embraced by Hal Lindsey, author of *The Late, Great Planet Earth*. The first scriptures LaHaye wants the reader to learn are Johannine: in *How to Read the Bible for Yourself* he directs the

reader to read 1 John seven times and then the Gospel of John twice before proceeding to the rest of the Bible. This lays out the worldview of American apocalyptic clearly: high Christology; the struggle between the Son of Man and the “Ruler of this World”; and the suspicion of institutional religious authority. The scriptural lens for the rapture are 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and the timetable of the rapture is triggered by this event.

Freedom in this series is when a sinner recognizes his bondage to sin and accepts Jesus Christ as his personal savior. This freedom allows the believer to embrace true faith, which will lead not only to salvation but also prosperity. During the tribulation, freedom gives the believer power to reject the Antichrist, work against him actively, and bring others to salvation. Believers are not affected by the Biblical plagues as they unfold. The plagues are sent to try to get the attention of mankind that judgment is coming and a choice must be made for or against Jesus. Those who suffer from the plagues are justly punished for rejecting Christ, and compassion for sufferers by the chosen is minimal. Compassion for followers of the Antichrist is superficial.

Compromise in this hermeneutic is seen as an ultimate rejection of the message. LaHaye put it succinctly in *Newsweek* (March 24, 2004): The Liberals have crafted a Jesus that’s unscriptural and to *their* liking . . . They want their God to be a big, benevolent grandfather who lets them into heaven anyway. The worst thing a person can do against God is to deceive people about the Bible. That’s satanically inspired.

This current of belief is completely uncritical of motivations: God’s actions are never questioned even if they seem contradictory to Divine nature. One plague (Apollyon) is of demons that torment unbelievers as insects, leading one character to call them “demons on a temporary assignment for God.” The reality that God may have created most of the people in the world to be damned is answered by the reminder (from John Calvin) that all are justly condemned for Original Sin. There is much to the *Left Behind* series that is internally inconsistent and unscriptural, and the series as a whole is ambivalent of institutional Catholicism. It is also popular reading among American troops in Iraq.

### **Language of Good vs. Evil**

*America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon  
for freedom and opportunity in the world.*

*And no one will keep that light from shining.*

*Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature*

President George W. Bush

September 11, 2001

**N**o other president with the possible exception of Ronald Reagan has articulated the sense of America in apocalyptic terms as consistently as George W. Bush. It is no accident that the War on Terrorism in the wake of 9/11 was initially called a crusade, and the term was withdrawn reluctantly while the spirit continues. The language of Good vs. Evil has been consistent since that day. Freedom replaces Jesus as the savior of the world, and those who hate freedom are the enemy. The right of justice to punish the perpetrators of 9/11 cannot be denied by any world body or government. The reward for this country and all of our friends around the world is peace and prosperity. Compromise is an affront against those who died and corrupts the great purpose of our country.

In fact, any apparent sign of weakness is seen as an act of disloyalty against America. Of course, one cannot negotiate with terrorists or even seek a root cause, other than “they hate freedom.” Our enemies are evil

*This freedom allows the believer to embrace true faith, which will lead not only to salvation but also prosperity.*

and anything other than striving for vengeance is an irrelevance that can only sap our strength. Compassion for the fallen is a sign of weakness and a useless exercise: mourning our own dead may cause us to question our cause, which would be unacceptable weakness, and mourning innocent Iraqi dead is counterproductive because it would also weaken our resolve. Keeping the pure faith is the key element in any crusade.

In an article titled “Cold Turkey” for the website *in these times*, Kurt Vonnegut wrote that no one was interested in putting the Beatitudes on a plaque in a public building. Christians would vocally protest to the point of tears that the Ten Commandments should be there, forgetting that those come from Moses instead of Jesus, but not mention the Beatitudes, which form the core of Christ’s teaching. There is tension between basic Christianity and the American religiosity as lived historically, and thanks to a renewed Apocalyptic focus in American politics, those tensions are stretched harder.

### **The Catholicism of St. Gaspar**

**E**valuating two events in Gaspar’s life through American iconography show mixed results that mirror the relationship with Apocalyptic America and Gasparian Catholicism. Gaspar’s refusal to take the loyalty oath to Napoleon in 1810 is faithful to the American icon of freedom in the best sense of the word. Gaspar stood

for absolute freedom of conscience and the right to resist an evil oppressor. On the other hand, Gaspar would not have had a chance to work in bandit-ridden Sonnino effectively. The crimes of Sonnino would have deserved just punishment in most American thought, and that would have likely meant armed destruction. Gaspar's plan would have denied that, and his compromise would have been seen as a root of future evil.

American prejudice against Catholicism runs through a great deal of American history. The Puritans identified the Pope with the Antichrist, and rejected Anglicanism because it was too much like Catholicism. The Catholic Church was a minimal presence in the Colonies and it took the great influx of Irish and German immigrants in the 1830s and 1840s to raise the Catholic population significantly. It was to serve this new need that Brunner brought the Precious Blood community to Ohio. There was a political party of the 1850s, the Know Nothing party, that was openly anti-Catholic, and Catholicism was one of the original targets of the KKK. Catholic identity played a huge role when Catholics have run for president: Al Smith lost partly due to opposition accusations that the pope would be running the White House; John F. Kennedy openly declared his independence of Church control in courting Protestant votes in his successful campaign. John Kerry's campaign has been hugely controversial among Catholics because he embraces a political viewpoint contrary to the bishops' goal of outlawing abortion (curiously, George Bush's rejection of Methodist social teaching is not commented upon by the popular press).

Sins against freedom are historic American accusations against the Catholic Church, whether it is condemnation of priestly celibacy for

*Gaspar's refusal to take the loyalty oath to Napoleon in 1810 is faithful to the American icon of freedom in the best sense of the word.*

unjustly confining love, Catholic adherence to dogma for unjustly confining prayer, Catholic ritual practice for unjustly confining worship, or Catholic moral teaching for unjustly confining individual conscience. These perceived sins against freedom convict us and invoke the icon of American vengeance by every possible means: American justice calls for the evil rulers to be punished, or at least disobeyed. Compassion for the seemingly undeserving poor and mercy to perpetrators are violations of American justice: the poor are not to be rewarded since they have not worked to better themselves and evildoers must be punished.

Our nuanced discussions and redefinitions of freedom and justice, our institutional rejection of vengeance as a morally acceptable



response, our call for regular examinations of conscience, and our vision of society as an instrument of God's grace are all generally seen as compromise and inherently distrusted. The risk we run in calling ourselves Catholics first is the risk Catholicism has always had: we could stand accused of disloyalty to the American iconography. There appear to be many attitudes similar to colonial preacher Jonathan Edward's famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God": we are justly bound for the lake of fire unless we accept the Call.

### **Risks of Living Catholic Identity**

**F**rench philosopher Gabriel Marcel said in *Man Against Mass Society* that in contemporary Western culture, reflection was the most suspect activity and what fed the destruction of individual dignity by current society. Lack of reflection is the great American sin: it presumes that our service to freedom is pure when in reality it is not; it presents opportunities for abuse in the process of serving justice; it accepts the right of vengeance without recognition of its futility or how innocents are accidentally harmed by it; it defines "compromise" as a solution mutually unacceptable to all parties involved rather than a search for true common ground.

In choosing to be Americans first and Catholic second, there is a price to pay in losing our identity to ourselves. In a real sense, to do this means accepting definitions of faith and iconography that are at best ambivalent and at worst contradictory to Catholicism. It is the typical American irony that we are free to be ourselves as long as we are not different.

What the Catholic Church has to offer are definitions of freedom and justice that do not have the historic baggage that the American icons have held. For us, freedom is freedom to respond to the guidance of the Spirit, to the call of the Blood, in cooperating in Christ's mission. Justice is about setting things right for all concerned: where healing is preferable to punishment and yet where there is accountability for every individual's actions.

American freedom is about true liberty of conscience; it is enshrined in the Constitution. Despite its flaws, America is the best country in the world and provided the opportunity for great blessing for all those who are its citizens. Freedom of religion, interpreted by American legal standards, should allow us to do anything in response to faith. Being American is an identity given its citizens either at birth or by adoption and cannot be taken away easily. The greatest challenge we face as Americans and Catholics is to recognize that we can respond to Christ as Catholics within our Catholic moral conscience, in response to

Christ and the redemption purchased in his Blood, called to proclaim the Good News of reconciliation and practice the Beatitudes, without having to conform to an American secular religiosity based on Apocalyptic Christianity.

We are free to live our Catholic identity in this country more than many places in the world and are free to call others to the same viewpoint. We can advocate a third way between Conservatism and Liberalism, calling the world to reflect on selfish motivations in determining the course of individuals and communities, and bringing together those who were kept apart. We can refuse to participate in systematic injustice of any kind: political, economic, or cultural to be true to our own nature as human beings and as Catholic Christians. We can see perpetrators as fully human, holding them accountable for their actions, respecting the rights of their victims and safeguarding communities without giving in to the call for blood vengeance. We can present ourselves as agents of true reconciliation and do what we can to effect reconciliation where we can.

Despite the tensions between American secular religiosity and Catholicism, if we are not able to be ourselves as Catholics first, then America has not been true to its own icon of freedom. This is a free country, and that should mean that we can be Catholics before we are anything else without being anti-American.



### For Reflection

- What does the word “freedom” mean to you?
- What does the word “justice” mean to you?
- How has the attention given to the “Last Days” affected you and your faith?
- Do you think that we are living in the “End Times”?



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## My Gift of Peace

'Tis not easy to leave my Beloved One a farewell gift—

I agonized for you in the garden,  
as my ruby-red drops of blood burst from my veins.  
Was that my goodbye gift to one I love?

They thorn-crowned me and made me a fool,  
as I stood there, longing for you.  
What kind of gift was my shameful stupor?

The whips tore my flesh and blood,  
exposing gaping wounds and hardening welts.  
Was this the parting gift to offer to my true love?

You were there with me as I dragged my cross up  
Calvary hell—I told you not to weep for me—  
I had nothing to offer you but a broken body.  
Sure this was not a true departure gift for my beloved.

But here, on the cross, I am stretched out across the world,  
suspended between heaven and earth!  
But, I will give you all you deserve, my dear one.

“Take and eat my body—Take and drink of my blood,  
Peace is my parting gift to you, my beloved!”

**-Madeleine Kisner, ASC**

*After teaching English and Literature for nearly 25 years at Newman University in Wichita, Kansas, Adorer of the Blood of Christ **Madeleine Kisner** is retired and living at the ASC Center in Wichita. She enjoys reading, giving book reviews, and attending musicals and movies.*