

REFLECTIONS

ON THE HUMAN VOCATION



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REFLECTIONS

ON THE HUMAN VOCATION

THE ART OF CONTEMPLATION

—OF REFLECTING, OF THINKING, OF MAKING INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS—IS ONE THAT PROVIDENCE COLLEGE PRESIDENT REV. BRIAN J. SHANLEY, O.P. HAS SAID LIES AT THE HEART OF THE HUMAN VOCATION. AND IT LIES AT THE HEART OF PC'S LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION AS STUDENTS ARE INTRODUCED TO THE LIFE OF THE MIND—A LIFE THAT VALUES THINKING AND KNOWLEDGE FOR ITS OWN SAKE.

In this issue of *providence*, we invite you to join with our contributors in contemplating the multiple facets of our human vocation.

Rev. Joseph J. Guido, O.P., vice president for mission and ministry and a practicing psychologist and faculty member, guides our reflections on finding God in difficult times and on dealing with grief and suffering in a society straining to find answers beneath the shadows that once—before 9/11—were the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

Dr. Ann W. Norton, advisor to the Asian Studies Program, shares her firsthand observations on the current state of affairs in Afghanistan, a society that seems a world apart from our own reality, yet which impacts our lives much more than we may realize.

Theology professor Dr. Sandra T. Keating, who represents the United States on the Vatican Commission on Religious Relations with Muslims, contributes her thoughts on the work of the commission and on how American Catholics must not become complacent or isolate themselves from the challenges of the Middle East.

In a more inwardly reflective context, three alumni consider their own human vocations and how the life of the mind and the spirit developed at PC has guided them.

Michael P. Leonard '70 frames for us moments in time from his College experience—moments through which he gained "the confidence to expose my thoughts to others."

A more recent graduate, Terence Sweeney '06, reveals how his own "divine comedy" at PC provoked an intellectual and spiritual path "of faith seeking understanding" that ultimately will lead him to the Dominican priesthood.

Finally, theology professor Rev. James F. Quigley, O.P. '60 shares his contemplations on what it means to be a priest and how—in the five decades since he began his own journey at Providence College—he has learned that "grace is everywhere."

FIVE YEARS AFTER THE TOWERS FELL:

Finding God in Difficult Times

by Rev. Joseph J. Guido, O.P., Vice President for Mission and Ministry

EDITOR'S NOTE

The following paper formed the basis of talks given by Father Guido last fall for Freshman Parents' Weekend and again on February 17, 2007, during Upperclassman Parents' Weekend. In addition to directing the Office of Mission and Ministry, Father Guido is an assistant professor of psychology and a counseling psychologist in the College's Personal Counseling Center.

On the night of September 11, 2001, more than 1,500 people gathered on the lawn in front of Slavin. Holding candles, huddled close together, and speaking in hushed tones, they listened as one person after another mounted the steps and stood at the microphone to speak. Some prayed for the dead, some prayed for those who had gathered, and still others prayed for the hijackers. Some sang, others pleaded—for faith, for tolerance, for forgiveness—while others told stories of loved ones lost, missing, or not heard from.

A young man stood off to the side with a group of friends. He was tall and lanky, with long brown hair, and had large, dark eyes that revealed both his fear and his desperation. His brother, who was also his best friend, worked at the World Trade Center. All through that day and into the night he called his brother's cell phone. But no one answered. Time and time again he called and time and again his brother did not answer. He never would. On his way out of the north tower he had stopped to help a co-worker who was having difficulty and—with that simple act of kindness—sealed his fate.

"Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). As the Protestant theologian Jorgen Moltmann (1974) has suggested, theology must be done within earshot of the dying cry of Jesus on the cross. It must also be done within earshot of our own cries, which echo his. Yet we should not presume to speak of God too quickly or easily. There



THE FACT AND ENORMITY OF HUMAN SUFFERING DEMAND A MEASURE OF REVERENCE AND HUMILITY.

was no immediate response to the cry of Jesus, no words of consolation, or pronouncement from on high, or assurance of final vindication. Just silence and what we presume were his mother's tears. The words would come later.

The fact and enormity of human suffering demand a measure of reverence and humility. In the wake of the tsunami that devastated southern Asia at Christmas 2004, Dr. David B. Hart, the Rev. Robert Randall Distinguished Professor in Christian Culture, wrote that,

the claim to discern some greater meaning—or for that matter meaninglessness—behind the contingencies of history and nature is both cruel and presumptuous at such times. Pious platitudes and words of comfort seem not only futile and banal but almost blasphemous . . . (Hart, 2005, p.6)

What is true about human suffering writ large in terrorist attacks and a tsunami is no less true about the private sufferings that we endure. A parent dies, a marriage comes apart, illness strikes a heavy blow, a job is lost, a friend betrays us, or loneliness is our constant companion. Our domestic tragedies are not less woeful for the fact that they are borne in the secret of our hearts and are shared with but few, nor do they require any less circumspection about what role God may have played in them or what good he can derive from them. As a grieving mother and theologian wrote,

Margaret Thea died when she was 4 days old. Theologians and mystics have seen in the lifegiving, protective power of human mothers images of God as mother. But right now these images feel very distant from me. I see mothers everywhere, their children trailing around them like planets around the sun. But my stomach is strangely loose and soft, and no baby sleeps in my arms. The fertility and hope of my life-giving body seem not powerful but foolish; my tears are matched with milk from a body that doesn't yet understand that the baby is gone. Dozens of people notice that I'm no longer pregnant and stop to smile and ask, "How is your baby?" And I give the crushing reply, "My baby died." No one predicts that answer. Many do not want to imagine my world. "Oh, now you have an angel in heaven, "they say, or "Now she's with Jesus". . . I know everyone means well. I know that these responses are meant to give me a better story to tell. But I do not want to tell some other story. As Margaret's mother, I want at least for my words to give her a life of her own. (Thompson, 2006, p.89)

This young mother reminds us that if we must speak cautiously of God amidst adversity we must nevertheless speak. Indeed, the alternative—not to speak—exacts an intolerable toll and betrays an imperative that is both deeply human and divine. As the prophet Jeremiah wrote,

I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it (Jeremiah 20: 9, 14).

Finding the words and finding meaning are among our most distinctly human traits (Deacon, 1997; Freud, 1959; Kegan, 1982) and we can no more afford to forego their exercise than we can life itself. To live as human beings is to find and use words to confect meaning even in the most difficult of circumstances. But if this meaning is to

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be more than mere invention, it must inhere in some truth about God. The question then becomes, Where can we find God amidst suffering?

Julian of Norwich and Kenneth Pargament are separated by more than an ocean and seven centuries. She was English, Catholic, and saintly, an anchoress of the 14th century who sought to understand the meaning of suffering through prayer. He is American, Jewish, and an empiricist, a 21st century psychologist who studies human resilience in the midst of suffering. Yet different though they are, they come to a common conclusion in answer to this question: namely, that in the worst of times, one must often find God, not as we have grown accustomed to, but anew—sometimes in a different guise and certainly at a deeper and altogether more personal level.



by the hand of the monk Nathanael, © 2007 Monastic Brotherhood of St. Theodore the Studite, Galion, Ohio.

Julian of Norwich: Finding meaning in suffering

The eminent historian Barbara Tuchman once described the 14th century as a distant mirror of our own age and so it would seem (Tuchman, 1987). Then as now, a plague ravaged the known world and although we are conscious of the devastation wrought by AIDS, especially in Africa, the Black Plague was even more deadly: one out of every three people in England died from it. England was also engaged in a protracted and unpopular war against France, even as we are fighting a stubbornly difficult and increasingly unpopular war in Iraq. Moreover, the Church in the 14th century was both corrupt and inept with rival claimants to the papal throne-one in Rome and one in Avignon-and, as it has done in recent years, was apt to turn a blind eye to the sins and crimes of its clergy.

It was in this context that a saintly woman pondered the meaning of human suffering. She is known to us as Julian of Norwich but it would seem that this is her chosen name, taken from the church where she lived as an anchoress. We do not

know her given name, or what she looked like, or her family lineage. What we do know is that she was well lettered in both English and Latin, unusual for a woman of the time; that she was bright, well loved by townsfolk and noble persons alike; and that she was deeply conscious both of the suffering in the world and of the love of Christ (Jantzen, 1988).

In 1373, when she was 30 years old, Julian fell seriously ill and, in the course of her illness, came very near to death. The symptoms of her illness suggest various maladiesfrom heart failure to botulism-but all of them imply something serious, painful, and protracted. It was during this time that she experienced 16 visions of Christ-which she called "showings"—which served to open her mind to the inner meaning of suffering and to its remedy. She is then a woman both well acquainted with suffering in general and with her own suffering, and so has much to teach us. But her teaching is not for the faint of heart.

Julian is perhaps known best for the phrase "all shall (will) be well,"

why do we suffer? ~ why did he suffer?

made famous by its inclusion in T.S. Eliot's final stanza of the *Four Quartets*. It is a phrase taken from her account of one of her "showings" of Christ in which the Lord answered her questions about suffering and evil. In the vision Christ assured her that,

I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I shall make all things well, and I will make all things well (Colledge & Walsh, 1978, p. 229).

Comforting words, to be sure, but they have to be understood in a context in which suffering is faced on its own terms. Julian does not offer us "cheap grace," as it were, or easy comfort. She says forthrightly that evil and suffering are a mystery that cannot be solved in this life:

It is God's will that in general one should know that all shall be well, but it is not God's will that we should know it now except as it applies to us for the present (Colledge & Walsh, 1978, p.152).

Indeed, she suggests that knowledge of God's will comes in two "portions," one evident and undisguised in the person and love of Jesus which assures us that God will redeem us from suffering, and the other hidden portion that is God's "privy counsel" and that will be revealed only in God's time and at his choosing (Janzten, 1988). When we suffer, therefore, we do so assured of our final vindication but also ignorant of how in its particulars our suffering makes any sense or is part of God's plan for our good.

In saying this, Julian is following St. Paul (Colossians 1:26-27) and using the word *mystery* in its original sense, that is, as something at once hidden and revealed. The Greek verb *muein* means to shut one's eyes, but also to see what is hidden, and *musterion*, which we translate as *mystery*, means a mystery that is not a mystery (Cunningham, 2006). Julian thus has every confidence that in the end God's will shall triumph and that all shall indeed be well, but until that time his will in its particulars—how exactly he will accomplish it in the circumstances of our lives—remains hidden. She is thus able to acknowledge the reality of suffering but also to affirm the reality of Christ's triumph over suffering.

It is important to note that Julian's "showings" occurred in the context of her meditation on the passion and death of Jesus. In one sense, the question "Why do we suffer?" requires an answer to the question, "Why did he suffer?" He could have saved us in any way he chose, so why did he choose this way? In pondering these questions, it was made known to Julian that while sin is the cause of suffering, it is not sin in the common sense that is the culprit. Following St. Augustine (Ryan, 1960) and St. Thomas Aquinas (O'Brien, 1965), Julian asserts that our sins express a more fundamental dimension of sin as a condition of absence, brokenness, fracture, and insubstantiality (Janzten, 1988). What we need to be saved from is less our lies, passions, rages, and lusts—sinful though they are—than the yawning absence of goodness and love that inspires them. Heal the underlying wound in the human soul, therefore, and there is no longer need for its various and tortured expressions.

For Julian, Jesus' suffering on the cross is an act of love, a giving of himself utterly and totally for us in order to heal our loveless nature, to fill the absence that haunts us with goodness, to mend our ruptured, broken condition, and so attenuate any need to sin again. That is why Julian says of Jesus' suffering, "Love was his meaning:" he suffered out of love for us so that, once loved in this way, we need not sin, nor suffer, again (Jantzen, 1988, p.91). She therefore gives us a new way to think about suffering, as a mystery both revealed

and hidden, and a new way of understanding the remedy for suffering—an act of love.

In doing so, she challenges many of our received notions about suffering and about God. There is here no concentration on suffering as a gift or blessing to be borne nobly, submission to the will of God as actively commanding our suffering, or any notion of suffering as our just desserts for sins committed. Rather, the emphasis is on a God who loves without limit even that which is without love, a God whose love would heal the loveless, and of a mystery of love-known in its grand design but hidden in its particular accomplishment—that is its own assurance. It is not suffering that has meaning and value but love (Hart, 2005, p.35), and into the "double mystery...of divine transcendence and human misery" (A Carthusian, 1999) Julian inserts divine compassion. It is this compassion that calls us out from what St. Therese of Lisieux called the "exile of the heart" (de Meester, 2002, p. 128) and that welcomes us

Ours is, after all, a religion of salvation. Our faith is in a God who has come to rescue his creation from the absurdity of sin, the emptiness and waste of death, the forces—whether calculating malevolence or imbecile chance—that shatter living souls; and so we are permitted to hate these things with a perfect hatred (Hart, 2005, p.101).

The psychology of religious coping

After the funeral of his brother, the young man returned to campus. He was grief stricken and angry, and not unexpectedly sought solace in his friends and in bouts of drinking. He feigned a good spirit in public, a certain bonhomie and return to his old self, but he was haunted by his loss and by a growing sense of his brother's "presence."

IT IS NOT
SUFFERING THAT
HAS MEANING AND
VALUE BUT LOVE . . .

This "presence" would be evident at moments of decision, prodding him to make the right choice, to shoulder the difficult burden, and always to go on and not lose hope. He mounted a photograph of his brother on his bookshelf, flanked it with a candle, and would sit and look at it, and sometimes close his eyes and think about his brother or pray to him. It was the only way he could find comfort when things were at their worst and, when things were a bit better, it provided him with the assurance that perhaps, in time, things would be better still. Although he had been raised Catholic, he had never been particularly religious and there was little in his background or experience to prepare him for his reliance on this newfound and altogether personal devotion. But rely on it he did, and it made all the difference.

In the immediate wake of September 11, newspapers were quick to report a spike in attendance at religious services. Subsequent research confirmed these reports. In the week following the attacks, 60 percent of Americans attended a religious service (Koenig, 2005) and 90 percent of adults reported that they turned to religion for comfort and support (Shuster et al., 2001). The closer one was to the tragedy, the more likely one was to turn to religion, whether the proximity was geographical—people on the East Coast were more likely to turn to religion than were people on the West Coast-or personal (Briggs, Apple & Aydlett, 2004; Plante & Canchola, 2004).

This turn to religion was not limited to its public expression. As did this young man, many people found a way to sanctify things that were otherwise personal and private—such as photographs, letters, or voicemail messages—or to make public objects and spaces personally meaningful and holy (Pargament & Mahoney, 2005). Perhaps the most notable example was Ground Zero. Without any prompting by religious or civic officials, it became a holy place, a place of pilgrimage, prayer, and meditation that evokes

from people the hushed tones and reverent attention that is usually reserved for places of worship. The same is true of less public grief. Makeshift roadside shrines of flowers, crosses, and the photographs of teenagers killed in an auto accident testify to our human need to sanctify experience, to find holiness in it, and to find meaning amidst the dread, sorrow, and rage.

Kenneth Pargament says that this search for meaning in terms of the sacred is at the very heart of religion and is why we turn to religion in times of crisis. Among the world's foremost authorities on religion and coping, Pargament is a clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Bowling Green University. He has studied how people cope with crises as diverse as the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma, floods, cancer, and war. In his landmark study of religious forms of coping (1997), he distinguished successful forms of coping from those that are unsuccessful precisely in terms of this search for meaning. Some of his findings are a bit surprising.

As one might expect, religious rituals and prayer can be a great help in times of trial but they can also prove to be of little or no help, or even make things worse. Being temporarily angry at God when confronted with adversity is only natural, but being persistently angry at God, or seeking to blame him, or assuming that the adversity is God's fault or an effect of his perverse will never helps. Nor is the support of a

religious community unique. The support of a community of people is a good and helpful thing but social support can come from neighbors, a club, or a fraternal organization as easily as it can from a church.

What religion has to offer that is unique and that cannot be found elsewhere or reduced to some other thing is a sense of meaning and significance in terms of what is sacred. When this is present, prayer and ritual are helpful; but when it is absent, they are not. Temporary anger at God does not cut us off from the sacred, while persistent anger does. And while the support of a community of faith and the support of neighbors have much in common, what is unique about a faith community is its faith, not the fact that it is a community.

Pargament says that when we are confronted with adversity, we ordinarily find meaning and significance by returning to what we have known and what has worked for us in the past. It may be a particular form of prayer, or a way of thinking about adversity-it is God's will, it is for the best, it will turn out to be a blessing in disguise-or an act of trust or abandonment to God's loving plan. He calls this the conservation of significance and says that it often works well: the crisis passes, our faith is strengthened, and what we have known and believed is confirmed. Yet there are experiences of adversity that overwhelm our ability to conserve meaning and significance, and that

threaten our customary ways of thinking about and relating to God. In the face of such experience, Pargament says that the challenge is not to conserve meaning and significance but to allow for its transformation and so, in effect, to re-find God and the sacred.

Some years ago, I worked with a woman in her fifties who had endstage, metastatic breast cancer. She was a wife of an Army general and both of her sons were Army officers, the three of them strong, stoic, and absolutely in denial of the fact that she was dying. She had enlisted me to help her tell them the truth and to get them to accept it. She told me that she was not happy about dying, that she hated the cancer and the fact that she was sick, and that she had been depressed for a time, refusing to pray and being furious for what appeared to be her abandonment after a lifetime of hard work, good deeds, and keeping the faith. What saddened her was the prospect of her husband's and sons' grief; more than anything, she wanted to spare them the suffering that was to come.

But she also told me that, over time, she had come to a new understanding of what was taking place. For the first time in her life, she could not do anything "worthwhile," as she put it. She could not teach her students, comfort her husband, watch over her sons and their children, or be much of a companion to her friends—and at times she could not stay awake long enough to finish her prayers. Even so, she had a



IF WE WISH TO UNDERSTAND SUFFERING, WE MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND God.

sense of being loved. Unable to do anything to warrant someone's love, she nevertheless found herself loved: her husband was tender and faithful, her sons gentle and patient, and God seemed closer than ever, forgiving, and accepting of everything. Deprived of all that she could do, she was free to be loved in her own right. In this, she began to understand what the New Testament means when it says, "Love consists in this: not that we have loved God but that he has loved us" (1 John 4:10).

The transformation of meaning and significance is not easy and many are tempted to forego it. It can be frightening, sometimes bewildering, and we are rarely adept at it and rather must stumble, fall, and try again until we get it right. It requires the ability to weather transition and uncertainty and to tolerate a fair degree of ambivalence as one casts about to find God and one's bearings anew. Fidelity becomes its preeminent virtue for, at times, staying the course of faith can take virtually all that we have to give.

It also requires a context in which new meaning can be found. Such a context can be immediate, in the form of fellow believers who guide and support us through the crisis, or it can be symbolic and intellectual, as in the rites, rituals, and teach-

ings of the Church. Almost always, it has a public dimension and a very personal one. But to those who are willing to endure a passage through this dark night of the soul (Kavanaugh & Rodriquez, 1973), a new light is assured. It will reveal a God altogether more subtle and sure than we had previously imagined and invite a faith in him at a more profound and personal level. The loss of a loved one may be felt no less acutely and the advance of a cancer may be no less rampant. But our suffering will not be without meaning. Darkness may have its hour but its final victory will be denied it.

All shall be well

It is not often that saints and mystics find company with modern psychology. More commonly, they are poised as if at odds with one another. Psychologists often look askance and skeptically at what seems to be mere wishful thinking on the part of religious people while the zealous among believers often regard psychology as both godless and arrogant. Yet Julian of Norwich and Kenneth Pargament have a common truth to tell and one that we would do well to heed.

If we suffer, we must be willing to acknowledge the suffering. Little good can come from denying suffering and certainly no good can come from our attempt to enlist God in our denial. God waits to be found amidst the suffering and not in pious bromides that serve only to temper its symptoms but leave its cause undaunted.

If we wish to understand suffering, we must first understand God. God is neither tame nor arbitrary, not simply understood or accommodating of our wishes but also not mean, perverse, or directly willing our suffering. God is God. His will is mysterious but also infinite in its compassion and love.

If we wish our suffering to have meaning, we must draw close to God. Holding on only to what we have known or storming away from God deprives us of the very meaning we seek while drawing close to God may well entail finding him anew. If love is his answer, as Julian taught us, then we must let him draw near to us, so that we can know his love for us, and with it our redemption from suffering.

It is no accident, then, that the Bible ends with a vision of God visiting his people in their sorrow and putting that sorrow to an end; revealing to his people the fullness of his loving plan, and so dispelling mystery forever; and drawing close to his people by banishing the old order and creating something altogether new.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them (as their God).

He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away."

The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." (Revelation 21:1-5)

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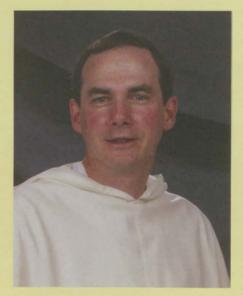
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Rev. Joseph J. Guido, O.P.



AFGHANISTAN REVISITED





by Dr. Ann W. Norton,
Professor of Humanities in Art History and Advisor to the Asian Studies Program



In March of this year I traveled to Afghanistan for nine days with "Women Making Change," a delegation sponsored by the human rights organization Global Exchange. While this was my first trip to Afghanistan, I found myself revisiting all that I knew about this war-torn country.

Our trip was promoted as a "reality tour," providing first-hand insight into the perspectives of Afghan women and their role in rebuilding the country after 30 years of warfare—even as the Taliban insurgency continues in the provinces. Professionally, our 11-member delegation, which was mostly American, included social workers, a human rights activist, a few women interested in fair trade opportunities, and another concerned about children's issues. I was the lone Asian art historian.

The delegation met with Afghan women from all sectors of society—including prominent politicians, judges, and activists—while also learning about the impact of war on the country's cultural, educational, and health care resources. We remained close to Kabul, the Afghan capital—staying in a guest house that may be best described as "rustic." We traveled in two passenger vans and were carefully monitored as a group, to avoid the

potential of any one of us being kidnapped or harmed. Before we departed the States, we were cautioned that the trip would be cancelled if Global Exchange felt it could become dangerous for us. The time for the anticipated "spring offensive" when terrorists are expected to re-emerge from their mountain hideaways was not yet here, and so we went.

Although I had not been to Afghanistan before, I traveled in Pakistan and lived in Bangladesh (when it was East Pakistan) in the 1960s. I have collected and studied Asian contemporary arts for many years. More recently, I have been interested in Afghan contemporary rugs that include woven war-related images of tanks, jeeps, and even the twin towers of the World Trade Center on 9/11 as the two hijacked planes tore into them with their fire and fury.

The purpose of my trip was to continue my study of contemporary Afghan carpets and crafts, with a particular focus on art after war. So, in one sense, this trip was an opportunity for me to revisit all that I had known about the art and culture and people of this country.

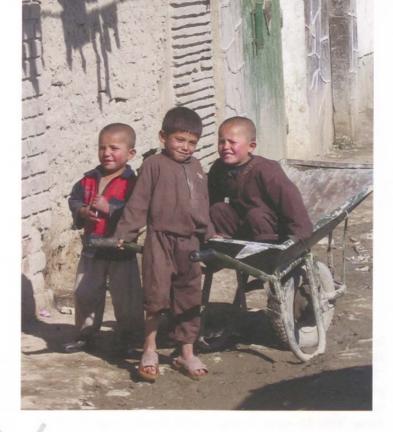
The art

It was shocking to see the Kabul Museum firsthand. What had been

a lovely building was semidestroyed by a missile as well as plundered by various invaders seeking to erase the past, including the Taliban. The only real art to be seen here was a room filled with almost life-sized primitive wooden sculptures from Nuristan in Northeastern Afghanistan, which had not been as ravaged by the wars. These too—though not immediately obvious—had been smashed and put back together.

Touring the museum, I wanted to weep when I snuck up a forbidden stairwell and opened protective sheeting to find empty, shattered display cases and hallways. There is hope, however, in the work started by UNESCO in December 2006 to rebuild the museum and repatriate artwork that had been smuggled outside the country for protection. (Before returning to the U.S., I stopped in Paris to visit the Musée Giumet, where some of the most precious artworks are being exhibited.)

On another day, we drove two hours outside Kabul to visit the town of Istalif, famous for its pottery. The entire town is being helped by The Turquoise Mountain Project, which is working with villagers to bring back local handicrafts, including ceramics, woodcarving, and calligraphy. The pro-



seventy PERCENT OF THE CHILDREN ARE MALNOURISHED

ject is also active in the Old City of Kabul, helping to preserve the buildings of Murad Khane Serai, the oldest settlement there. The Turquoise Mountain Project is funded partially by Great Britain's Prince Charles through his School for Traditional Arts in London and by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and a Jordanian group.

We met several of the teachers as well as Rory Stewart, a Scotsman and chief executive of the Turquoise Mountain Project who authored *The Places in Between*, a book chronicling his 2002 solo walk across Afghanistan. Stewart, who also served in the British Foreign Service in the Middle East, has been working with Prince Charles and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who dreamed up the project when Karzai visited Britain. In addition to resurrecting the traditional crafts, the project is renovating old buildings in the hope of creating a revitalized arts community.

The children

The future of the children of Afghanistan was a concern of our entire delegation. Seventy percent of the children are malnourished and most have had little or no schooling over the war years.

We visited two vocational schools operated by Afghans for Tomorrow (A4T), a group started in the late 1990s by Afghans—many of them who had become refugees—to rebuild their country. The students at these schools were mostly girls—all very poor or refugees from the countryside. There were also a few disabled boys. A4T started enrolling boys after one of their schools in Warduk, south of Kabul, was burned by religious extremists, partly because they were educating only girls.

The goal of these schools is to educate the students to reach the equivalent of sixth grade, so they can move on to the government-supported schools. In the meantime, these young people are studying English and learning to make crafts, clothing, and beautiful Arabic calligraphy as a future means of livelihood.

We also visited an orphanage founded by RAWA, a radical Afghan women's group. One member of our delegation was a sponsor for two of these children and we had the opportunity to meet them personally.



We visited another school operated by ASCHIANA, the Afghan Street Children Project, to help these children learn English and crafts that will help them earn a living. These children still spend time working on the streets selling gum, shining shoes, but now also go to school. One of the teachers we met here was American. There are five of these schools in Kabul, helping 10,000 of the 70,000 children who need even preliminary education.

There is also a Children's Bank operated by and for the street children. The head of the bank is a 14-year-old boy who was sent to India to learn about money lending and other bank operations through a similar children's bank in that country.

The wars

The reality of war and its impact on the people of this country was perhaps the most evident when we visited a land mine museum and a mine field that is still being cleared. On display in the Omar Mine Museum are hundreds of land mines that have been dug up and deactivated. Thousands of Afghans have been killed and maimed by these mines, which were planted by various forces. One of the souvenirs I brought back to Providence is a cloth imprinted with illustrations of various types of land mines. Such graphics are used to show people what these devices look like, so that they will be cautious as they move about the outskirts of Kabul and the countryside.

After viewing the mines up close in the museum, we visited the Shamoline Valley where some 1,300 workers are now helping to "demine" the HALO Trust Mine Field. As mine fields are cleared and secured, houses are built on the land by the returning refugees in need of shelter. This once-lush valley was part of the king's property and included a zoo that is now abandoned, its walls crumbling.

The de-mining project is supported by several countries, including the U.S., Great Britain, and Japan. Even with all this help, however, our guide indicated that they estimate another 20 years of work ahead of them. The Russian mines, he said, are particularly strong and waterproof. Dark green flags planted in the mine field mark the graves of those who died there.

We later visited an orthopedic hospital that assists land mine victims and spent time in the workshops where some of the victims have been trained to make crutches, prostheses, and wheelchairs to help others. In the hospital's clinics were Afghans of all ages—from young boys to old women—who are learning to walk again with their new limbs.

The International Red Cross has been assisting these efforts, along with foreign nationals and Diaspora Afghans who have returned to their country to help. Since 1988, Afghanistan has registered over 31,000 amputees, most of them the victims of land mines or other warrelated incidents. Schools in Kabul often include a display case of deactivated land mines, reminding children of their need to be on the lookout for these deadly devices.

The women

Our trip was timed to coincide with International Women's Day on March 8. To celebrate this day, we were invited to an event recognizing Afghan women and their achievements. It was held at the Hotel Intercontinental in Kabul where





Top: Young Afghan students. Bottom: Celebrants at the March 8 International Women's Day event included this Afghan military official.



Providence connections: The author, Dr. Ann W. Norton, left, with Dr. Anwar Ahady, Afghanistan's minister of finance and former professor of political science at PC, center, and his wife, Fatima Gailani, president of their country's Red Crescent Society.

security was very tight and our belongings carefully searched as we entered the ballroom. One of the speakers seated at the dais had ties to Providence College—Fatima Gailani, head of the Afghan Red Crescent (Red Cross), and wife of Dr. Anwar Ahady, former professor of political science, who is now the country's minister of finance. (The couple returned to Afghanistan after 2001 to help rebuild their homeland.)

It was obvious from the Women's Day celebration that many Afghan women enjoy active careers. Several were dressed in Afghan Army uniforms. Professional Afghan women generally wear head scarves versus the traditional "burkas." All of the women in our delegation wore head scarves, though we did observe some Western visitors who did not. (In the city, however, about half of the women we saw were dressed in burkas.)

From Gailani, who graciously hosted me one evening with her husband for a family dinner, I learned more about the many ways Afghan culture is being revitalized. She made me more aware of how Afghans want to market their crafts and clothing to the West. One organization called AWWSOM—

Afghanistan World Wide Shopping Online Mall—features traditional-looking Afghan designs tailored as high fashion. This fair-trade group donates 20 percent of its profits to charities that help victims of the wars.

Our delegation also met with the radical women's group RAWA—Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan—which founded the orphanage we visited. Mostly young feminists, several were without head scarves. Their rhetoric and tone reminded me of the women's liberation movement of the U.S. in the 1960s. Understandably, this group is problematic in Afghanistan; much of its financial support comes from abroad.

A perceptibly more balanced position was presented by Dr. Massouda Jalal, the former minister of women's affairs. In her meeting room were banners in English and Arabic with phrases such as "There is no love stronger than loving the homeland" and "Prosperity of society is more important than prosperity of a person." Jalal's present focus is to encourage all Afghan women to obtain identity cards. She sees this as an important step towards their taking charge of their own lives in the new Afghanistan.

An ongoing exchange

Our delegation's purpose was ambassadorial, in that we were to mainly listen and observe. It was clear that even after preparatory research and reading, we would encounter new aspects of an emerging culture.

A goal of Global Exchange is to truly "exchange"—sharing new understandings in our own country. I feel fortunate that I have the opportunity to incorporate my findings in an Asian Studies Program seminar next fall, "Asian Perspectives Seminar: Afghanistan."

My trip convinced me that no one book can cover the entire spectrum of Afghanistan. The media and the Internet cannot even keep up with changes and nuances of the country's development. For the seminar, I plan to introduce e-mail dialogues between students and Afghans. I will also invite Afghan speakers who will help bring alive their evolving culture for the class and for the College. My hope is that through this global, academic exchange at Providence College, our students will have a better understanding of a "foreign" land that most Americans have only come to know through the lenses of September 11, 2001.

Promoting dialogue to address terrorism

The Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims

by Dr. Sandra T. Keating, Assistant Professor of Theology



The concern for bringing terrorism, in all its forms, to an end is of the highest priority at the Vatican. The desire of the Holy Father is to address the problem at its root and bring about peace without violence. This, of course, is very difficult, but remains our hope. The feeling of the Vatican is that, although there is a great sense of urgency to solve crises worldwide, careful thought must first be given to the most appropriate course to improve relations between Muslims and Christians.

Since his visit to Turkey, there have been several high-level dialogues that have addressed particular issues surrounding human rights and religion, and especially religious freedom—a topic at the forefront of the Holy Father's concern. Since the Vatican does not represent any political entity, dialogues with Muslims are often able to raise pertinent questions both in theoretical and practical ways that may not otherwise be addressed.

Currently, those of us appointed to the Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims are still gathering information and assessing where most of our energy should be directed in the next three years. In the past year, we have focused on gathering information about Muslim and Christian relations in

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dr. Keating, an authority on the theological aspects of Islam, was appointed to a five-year term on the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims by Pope Benedict XVI in 2005. As the U.S. representative, providence asked her to provide an update on the commission's work.



various parts of the world. Each member is identifying unique situations—both positive and challenging—in his or her own community, as well as worldwide trends. This spring, for example, I am involved in several meetings with Muslims, both locally and regionally, which will be very useful to the commission's work.

My own personal experience in speaking with those who live in close proximity to large Muslim populations has reminded me how detached from the situation worldwide Americans can become. However, I think that it is absolutely necessary that we, as Catholics, not allow ourselves to become complacent or to choose the most convenient way out. It is an American tendency to isolate ourselves and focus on our own self-interest.

From my conversations with other commission members and experts with whom we have consulted, I have come to believe that we can improve relations with the Muslim world and overcome the threat of terrorism and violence only through a multi-faceted approach. This includes economic, educational, and other forms of assistance, as well as the minimal military presence necessary to create the stability for society to flourish.

We should not be afraid, nor should we act selfishly. One of the greatest concerns is that the U.S. will lose the interest or the courage to continue to stabilize the Middle East. As Catholics, we cannot allow that to happen.



Pope Benedict XVI with Müslim clerics during his visit to the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey, in November 2006.

GOING YOUR OWN WAY

REFLECTIONS ON A PROVIDENCE LEGACY

by Michael P. Leonard '70 & '00Hon.

This is my last Parents' Weekend! For 17 out of the last 19 years, my wife, Cathy, and I have had one or more of our children at Providence College. Our youngest, Brendan, is now a senior and will graduate in May. So, this is it!

I never pushed my children to attend Providence College. They decided on their own and each came for a different reason. Of course, they knew how I felt about the school, heard all my PC stories, and saw how I stayed connected to old classmates and to my former hockey coach, Lou Lamoriello '63. But, when I came here in 1966, PC was a far different school than it is today. For one thing, it was all male. Also, I was a hockey player and my children would not be playing a sport, so I wanted them to choose schools that fit their particular needs.

When it came time for our oldest son, Matthew '93, to look at colleges, PC was one of four or five colleges and universities on his list. I was with him when he toured the PC campus in 1989. It was a beautiful spring day. People were friendly. They held doors open and said, "Hello." The same spirit of friendliness that I remembered from my days here and that same undefined quality that made the school special was still evident. Clearly, Matt felt comfortable on campus that day; it felt like home to him. Also, as a musician Matt was drawn to the great music scene in Providence. So, he came to PC.

Two years later, it was my oldest daughter's turn to look at schools. Megan (Megan Leonard Fleischel '95) loves music and art and saw that Providence and the surrounding communities were loaded with artistic and musical people, so she came on board. Then my daughter Kerry '00 chose PC because of its theatre program. Only Brendan '07, who had gone to PC hockey camps as a teen, said from the very beginning that Providence College was the school for him. And, he was right. During his freshman year, he filmed many of the segments for his

EDITOR'S NOTE

Storyteller Mike Leonard, feature producer for NBC's Today show, author of The Ride of Our Lives—Roadside Lessons of an American Family, former PC hockey player, and father of four past and present PC students, shared anecdotes and reminiscences with other parents and students on Saturday, February 17, 2007, during the College's annual Upperclassman Parents' Weekend. This article is based on his extemporaneous talk.

ABC Family TV show, *The Brendan Leonard Show*, on campus. Now he's in a rock band. So, all of our children came to PC for different reasons and all of them took away something different from the experience.

Go your own way

I have been at NBC for 26 years and am the only reporter at any of the networks who has the freedom to choose his own story subjects and the only reporter who doesn't have to run his scripts by a producer for approval. I work out of my home, shooting and editing stories that separate me from the pack, stories that interest me. No Anna Nicole Smith. No Brittany Spears. No O.J. Simpson.

Why and how did I get this freedom? I think the answer is here . . . on this campus. This is where I learned to be creative. This is where I gained the confidence to expose my thoughts to others. There is something about PC that nurtures creativity.

I don't think it's a coincidence that three National Hockey League (NHL) general managers plus a successful NHL coach are former PC students. No other school can claim that distinction. A former PC student coached the 2006 and 2007 NCAA championship men's basketball team. The "winningest" coach in the NBA graduated from PC as did major actors, senators, and business leaders. PC has produced more successful graduates than you would expect from a school of this size. Maybe it's the fact that there are no fraternities or sororities so everyone is on the same level. Maybe it's the presence of the Dominicans. Whatever it is can't be adequately measured. It's like great art or music. It moves you, but you can't always say why.

I was a struggling student in high school. I might have had a learning disability, but there were no tests for that in my day. Despite my academic problems, I knew that I was going to live a creative life, and I knew it because of a chance encounter I had with a musician. It was the summer after my sophomore year in high school. I went with some friends to an outdoor concert at Ravina Park in Highland Park, Illinois. The musician playing was Bob Dylan, but he wasn't famous yet. I left my buddies and wandered up to the bandstand to get a closer look. Dylan had no backup musicians. He stood alone with his guitar and harmonica holder. Up until then all the pop songs I heard seemed to be about girls or cars or surfboards. Dylan's words were different. He sang, "Yes, to dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free."

I didn't know what he meant, but I loved the sound of the words. And, that's when I started thinking about the power of words. I also liked the fact that he was standing there alone—a creative force doing something that nobody else was doing. That's when I decided that I too could stand alone and be creative. That's when my ship left the dock.

Frame the moment

While I was at Providence College, I bought a Super 8 movie camera. I had always seemed to be aware of time passing quickly and thought that a movie camera would help slow down time by preserving little moments, by framing them. In a sense, I had already been doing that in my head by taking mental movies of things that were happening around me, even on the hockey rink.

I had grown up going to Chicago Black Hawk games and loved it when the hockey players lined up on the blue line for the national anthem, especially the Canadian national anthem. I never imagined that I would do it one day. Years later, there I was in a PC uniform standing on the blue line before a pre-season game against a Canadian university. When they started to play "Oh Canada," I turned to the player next to me and said, "How cool is this?" "How cool is what?" he answered. "This," I repeated. "This whole scene. You and me standing here, the anthem, the crowd." He didn't know what I was talking about. He didn't know that life speeds by and that sometimes it's a good idea to take an imaginary step back to look at these little moments that loom large in life.

A college career is made up of many of these small moments that will zoom by unless you frame them . . . a funny conversation in the cafeteria, an interesting discussion in class, a walk across campus on a nice spring day. Don't take those moments for granted for they will blow right past you.

The Super 8 movie camera allowed me to capture some of those scenes

. SOMETIMES IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO TAKE AN IMAGINARY STEP BACK TO LOOK AT THESE LITTLE MOMENTS THAT LOOM LARGE IN LIFE. Michael P. Leonard '70



IT WAS AT PC THAT I LEARNED TO BE OPEN TO POSSIBILITIES AND TO PEOPLE.

and making movies became my favorite creative outlet. I made short films about everyday college life, added music, and showed them to my friends and fellow students. I was a beginner so the films were flawed, but that's what creativity is all about: trying something new, reaching higher, exposing your thoughts, and, in the process, your flaws. I used to be afraid to expose my flaws, worried what people might think, but the atmosphere on the PC campus, the friendliness, the support, and the encouragement helped me get past my fear of failure.

When you reach higher than you think you can, you are going to fall and get bruised. But, instead of hiding those bruises, we should celebrate them. I played hockey in an era before face shields and mouth guards. We had broken noses, rows of stitches, missing teeth, and black eyes-blemishes that you would try to cover up under normal situations. But, we didn't try to hide our bruises and blemishes. We were proud of them because they showed that we were in the game. I think the same holds true for life. When you are afraid to fail, afraid to show your flaws, you don't reach higher, you don't push past your comfort zone. You limit yourself.

Be open and feel the breeze

I think the winds of opportunity blow by each of us in equal proportion. But, to feel that breeze—a breeze that might be almost imperceptible—you have to take off the jacket that hides your flaws. Once you are open, you will feel that breeze and you will be able to raise your sail. That's when your boat leaves the dock.

I heard a great quote once. "Ships are safe in the harbor, but that's not what ships are built for." Boats are built to sail and we are built to sail them. The waters sometimes get choppy; sometimes we hit rocks and scar the boat. But, that's life. That's how we get from one place to another. Don't be afraid to show the scar. It's not a blemish; it's a badge of honor.

Being open works both ways. It can benefit people around you in unimaginable ways. About 20 years ago while traveling through Iowa, I noticed a monastery and stopped to visit. I was looking around the bookstore when I heard a voice ask, "Are you Irish?" In the far corner sitting on a stool was an ancient monk. "My grandparents came from Ireland," I answered. "And hearing your accent, I bet you are from there as well. Where are you from?" I asked. "A little town in Tipperary," he replied. "Nobody in America has ever heard of it." "Have you been back?" I asked. "No," he said. "I haven't been past these front gates since I came here at 17." I asked him again about the town name and again he replied that nobody would know it. Finally, after a third try he said the town's name was Fethard.

"Not only have I heard of it," I told him, "I've been there." Then I described to the monk how I had been in Ireland a few years earlier on assignment for NBC and had wandered around the countryside exploring out-of-the-way towns and villages. Fethard was the only town where I took my home video recorder out of the rental car and shot footage, later wondering why

because there was nothing special about the place. The monk had never seen a movie and seemed confused by what I told him.

When I returned home, I searched for this tape—one that I had never viewed—and sent it to the head abbot at the monastery along with a note encouraging him to rent a VCR and a TV. About a month later I received a letter from the old monk. In a scrawled hand he had written, "God sent an angel. I was able to go back home before I died."

Prior to reading his note, I had never considered myself anything close to an angel. But, then I realized that an angel is just a delivery boy, a messenger. I was able to deliver something priceless to the monk and it only happened because we were open with each other.

PC's legacy

How are these experiences related to PC? In many ways.

The College inspired me to seek answers, to take off my coat of insecurity. It was at PC that I learned to be open to possibilities and to people. It was here that I felt that breeze of possibility and sailed off in a direction that didn't seem possible in my younger days.

That same breeze is blowing across this campus right now. You can't see it, you can't photograph it, you can't put it in a college guidebook, but it's here.

So, be open to it, feel it.

The Priestly Vocation



FOR GENERATIONS, YOUNG MEN GRADUATING FROM PROVIDENCE COLLEGE HAVE PURSUED THE PRIESTLY VOCATION, DEDICATING THEIR LIVES TO THE SERVICE OF GOD AND SOCIETY. FOR SOME, IT WAS THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF PC AS A CATHOLIC AND DOMINICAN COLLEGE THAT ATTRACTED THEM TO CAMPUS, HAVING ALREADY HEARD THE CALL TO THE PRIESTHOOD. FOR OTHERS, IT WAS THE LIFE OF THE MIND AND THE SPIRIT AT PROVIDENCE THAT IGNITED THEIR MINISTERIAL VOCATION AND DREW THEM TO SEMINARY AND SERVICE.

IN THE FINAL TWO STORIES OF THIS ISSUE, TWO ALUMNI DECADES APART SHARE INTROSPECTIVE REFLECTIONS ON THEIR PRIESTLY VOCATIONS. FOR TERENCE SWEENEY '06, PROVIDENCE COLLEGE WAS HIS Divine Comedy, LEADING HIM TO AN UNEXPECTED SALVATION. HE WRITES HOW HIS INTELLECTUAL JOURNEY THROUGH PC MADE HIM SEE HIMSELF IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT, LEADING HIM THROUGH GRACE TO A NEW FAITH AND HAPPINESS, AND TO HIS NEW VOCATION.

REV. JAMES F. QUIGLEY, O.P. '60 OFFERS HOW BEING A PRIEST, FOR HIM, IS BEING A "FATHER" WHO LIVES FOR AND LOVES HIS CHILDREN. HE REFLECTS ON WHAT HIS VOCATION AS AN *alter Christus* FOR CLOSE TO 50 YEARS HAS MEANT TO HIS LIFE—BOTH WITH HIS STUDENTS AT PROVIDENCE COLLEGE AND IN HIS ROLE AS FORMATION ADVISOR AND MENTOR FOR SEMINARIANS AT THE NORTH AMERICAN COLLEGE IN ROME.



my divine comedy

by Terence Sweeney '06

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE JOURNEY OF OUR LIFE/

I FOUND MYSELF IN A DARK WILDERNESS/

FOR I HAD WANDERED FROM THE STRAIGHT AND TRUE.

With these words, Dante began his *Divine Comedy*. Looking back on it now, I realize that when I entered Providence College I, too, had wandered from the straight and true. I rarely find it valuable or wise to write about oneself on the pages of the Commentary section of *The Cowl* but I feel the need in my final article to explain why I so often refer to Providence College as my beloved, why Providence College is my Beatrice. The answer is this: as Beatrice's prayers lead to Dante's salvation, Providence College's education saved me when I was lost in a wilderness.

This may seem like a bit of hyperbole but I mean it sincerely. When I arrived at Providence College, I was a fervent although not fully open atheist. I came to a Catholic school with the conviction that religion was a farce, but paradoxically believed that Catholics were unique in their ability to offer a liberal arts education. My hope was quite simply to learn from the Catholics what I could, so I could continue in Voltaire's mission "to kill the infamous thing [the Church]."

EDITOR'S NOTE

The author originally wrote this article for The Cowl, PC's student newspaper. Since graduating, he was accepted to become a Dominican of the Eastern Province of St. Joseph and begins what will be a seven-year journey this July back where it all started for him-at Providence College, for his first month in the pre-novitiate. He will receive the habit of the Order at the beginning of August, on the feast of St. Dominic, in Cincinnati, where he will spend his first year at the novitiate. He will then spend six years at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C., studying philosophy and theology while also participating in pastoral work. At the end of these seven years, he will be ordained, as he says, "God willing." Following his ordination, Sweeney hopes to continue his studies to earn a Ph.D. in history and continue his ministry in higher education. Says the future Dominican Friar, "This will most likely mean I will return to PC as a professor. All of this lies in God's hands and in the hands of my superiors in the Order."

... "FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING" WAS THE PATH TO TRUTH.

But our God works marvelous deeds and, although I did not will it, I soon found my faulty principles collapsing. I had based my antireligious convictions on the principle that all religion was fundamentally irrational and-since man's highest attribute was reason-religion was an assault on the greatness of man. I believed that religious ethics sought to enslave people to a morality of altruism instead of a true morality of selfish individualism. I was content, proud, and unhappy in my belief. But like Milton's Satan, in my unhappiness, I thought I was strong and that I "could make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

But our great school would not let me lightly rest on my arrogant high school philosophies. Like all my fellow students, I was tossed into a course that demanded that I study not only the things I believed in, but also the full catalogue of Western ideas. A great strength of Providence College is that it believes in truth and therefore is not afraid of falsehood. Providence College makes us read Nietzsche when he declares, "God is dead but . . . for thousands of years his shadow will be shown. - And we - still have to vanquish his shadow." The Thomistic virtue of this school is that it is not afraid of objections in our search for truth.

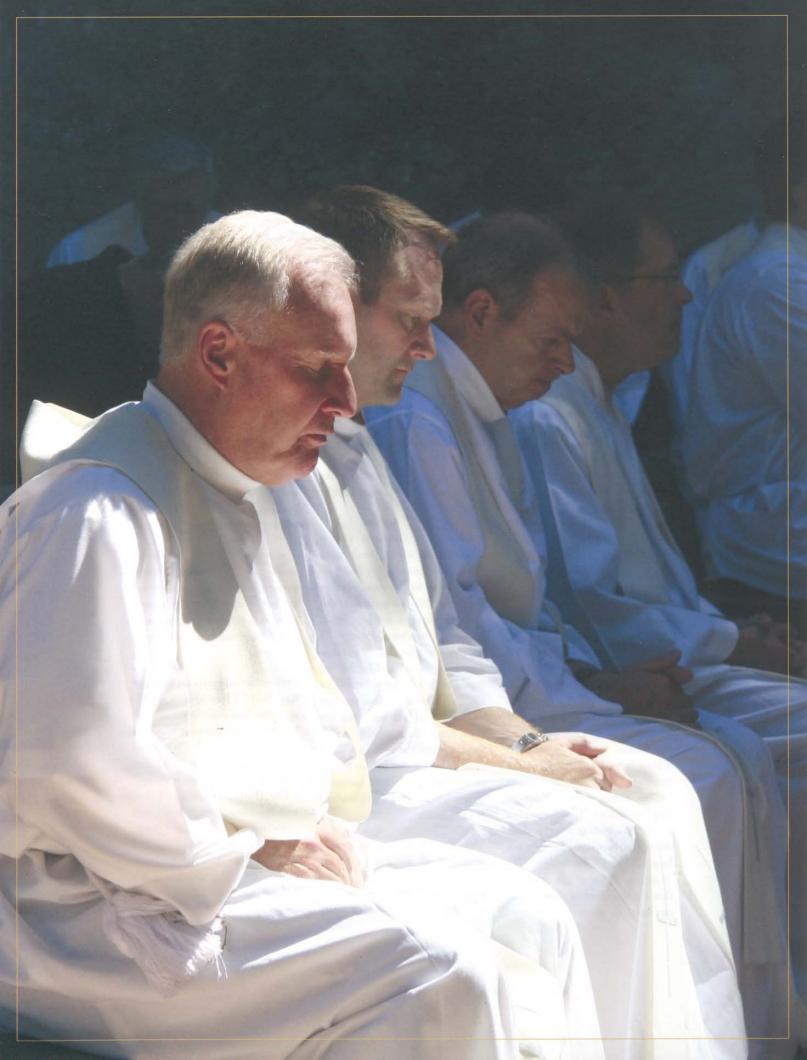
I soon found my values and ideals unraveling as I watched the West grow and decay. Reading Aquinas, Dante, Kierkegaard, Beckett, Milton, Chaucer, Eliot, and above all Dostoevsky, I realized that the philosophies of men fail. I could not create a response to Dostoevsky's claim that "if you were to destroy in mankind the belief in immortality, that not only love but every living force maintaining the life of the world would at once be dried up."

Fundamentally, Dostoevsky's claim is that without a living, loving God, there is no meaning, no hope, no value to my life or yours, that we should face life as a living hell, that upon our births our mothers should whisper in our ears "abandon all hope ye who enter life." It was then that I began to understand the depths of the truths that Providence College believed in. That the only way to Veritas was faith, but not faith alone, "faith seeking understanding" was the path to truth. I came to believe that only in the ark of Christ's Church could humanity be saved. It was then that I returned to the Church.

This may seem like a rather cerebral story but all along my path at Providence I have been enriched by a community of people beyond compare. As I have struggled on my pilgrimage through Providence to seek he who heals the sick, I have been aided by great friends, great people, and great Dominicans. For when I entered the classroom, I found Rev. David L. Stokes, assistant professor of theology, and his wisdom; when I entered St. Dominic Chapel, I found Rev. Paul J. Keller, O.P., adjunct instructor of theology, and his great faith; and when I entered all those bars through these years, I found Nick, Joe, Jon, and Mike to discuss this journey to faith.

The point to all this is that I owe so much to Providence because through Providence I found grace. I am not unique in this because I know that others in different ways found happiness and faith here at Providence.

Providence College claims to "transform lives." I have seen in my life and other lives that this is true. And I yearn for the moment when we will all sing together "Mother of Truth, we proudly pledge to thee undying love and steadfast loyalty." I love Providence College, I shall miss Providence College, and I shall never forget Providence College because without Providence, I would not have the hope that I may some day see "the love that moves the sun and stars."



by Rev. James F. Quigley, O.P. '60, Rev. Carl J. Peter Chair of Homiletics at the Pontifical North American College, Vatican City

to be a 1011CST

EDITOR'S NOTE

Father Quigley, associate professor of theology at Providence College, was named the Rev. Carl J. Peter Chair of Homiletics at the Pontifical North American College in Rome while on sabbatical from PC in 2005. He initially joined the faculty in 1969 as a special lecturer in religious studies, at which time he was also director of vocations for the Dominican Province of St. Joseph.

When you are having fun, 50 years can go by quickly!

In 1956, I arrived at Providence College to begin my life as a Dominican and to study for the priesthood. A good part of my life since then has been spent at Providence College. As I reflect on these years, I am really thankfulto God for His invitation and grace to serve Him as a priest of Jesus Christ; to my brother Dominicans for being brothers; to my family for their constant support and love. I am especially thankful to the thousands of people, mostly Providence College students, who have shared their lives with me.

Two years ago, I was invited to assume the Rev. Carl J. Peter Chair of Homiletics at the Pontifical North American College (NAC) in Vatican City, which prepares American seminarians for the ministerial priesthood and service throughout the United States. Providence College gave me an extended sabbatical as one of its ways of serving the American Catholic Church.

Going back to a seminary after more than 40 years was at times a bit of a challenge; the schedule is full and the days are long. I have been inspired, however, by the spirituality, prayerfulness, zeal, and Gospel enthusiasm of the men at NAC. This year, there are 172 men in formation. All graduates of universities—six graduated from Providence College—they are in Rome to study theology and be part of a formation program for priest-

hood. Some are recent college graduates; others were attorneys, businessmen, accountants, teachers. There are some very gifted athletes, talented musicians, budding artists, and scholars. Each one believes that God has mysteriously spoken to him and said, "Come, follow me!"

To be another Christ

To be a priest is to be another Christ, an *alter Christus*. That can sound pretty pretentious when not properly understood. Catholic theology believes that the sacrament of Holy Orders marks a man, consecrates a man to God and to service to His people.

The seminarians at NAC are not careerists. They are not looking for power, position, or self-aggrandizement. For them—and hopefully for every priest—it is all about Jesus Christ. A priest tries hard to be so one with the risen Lord Jesus Christ that he can say with St. Paul: "I live, now not I, but Christ lives within me." Of course, such spiritual identification becomes a lifelong project. Without doubt, these seminarians remind me that I am surrounded by grace—grace is everywhere.

To be a priest is to serve people. The Eucharist is the center of life for every priest. In sacramental communion, we are fed and nourished and our lives transformed by the living Christ. The Eucharist is the "soul of the apostolate."

I see our seminarians everyday reach out to all kinds of people with the style of Christ. They have included me in their visits to poor immigrants from Latin America who have come to Rome for work and a better life. I have gone with them to

visit AIDS patients in a hospice and heard them speak with great respect to the homeless and gypsies. A number serve American military and their families at a Navy base near Naples. These priests in training are learning to be Christ and they are doing it well.

They are also experiencing what I did at Providence College. Priesthood brings you into contact with so many good, holy, wonderful women and men. You learn so much, get so much, become so much by serving others. I always believed that if you care and like people, they care and like you right back. Again, as any good student of St. Thomas Aquinas knows, grace is everywhere.

To be a "father"

To be a priest is to be a "father." There is no doubt that the Catholic community needs the special gifts of women in ministry. We need the talents of laity, women and men. As never before, this is happening in the American church. Our community also needs "fathers." Ministerial priesthood is not just a function. It is a way of being, a consecration, an ordination to be a "father."

My many years at Providence College have put me in contact with a good number of students and alumni. They all call me "Father." A father is one who generates, supports, cares for, lives for, and loves his children. The relationship is not one of dominance or control. A priest is a spiritual father who tries, to the best of his abilities, to be there for his people.

To be a priest is to be a poet. A poet is someone who tries to speak the ineffable. A poet names grace.

Priests proclaim the word of God and celebrate our communities' foundational rituals, such as baptism, Eucharist, reconciliation. The hardest thing I have had to do all through these years has been to preach. I once thought that for a Dominican, it would be easy. But it has not been. To speak God's word is such a privilege. To preach God's word to such good, faithful, self-sacrificing people, Sunday after Sunday, in their "good times and bad," is very humbling.

One of my jobs at the North American College is to help future priests learn to preach. They are very enthused about preaching and really work hard at their practice homilies. In fact, they are already pretty good at preaching. Our seminarians want to be poets. They want to clearly express their experience of Mystery, of the One and Triune God who loves all of us so much that, as Rev. Paul Murray, O.P., the Irish Dominican poet, put it, "if any one of us ceased to exist God would die of sadness."

Some 50 years ago, I began my Dominican life at Providence College. I was ordained almost 42 years ago as a priest. My life has been blessed by God in so many ways through all the holy, generous, wonderful people who have come into my life. I really pray that the same things happen to these seminarians at the North American College.

I hope they meet Christ as I did in students, alumni, families, the poor, brother priests, and religious. I hope they experience the presence of grace everywhere. And then say thank you!

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