

into the wilderness, but now it is seen as a wilderness not of native savagery but of culturally regnant apostasy and secularism.

Most of them, to be sure, are not of the original stock of the proprietors. Their story of Christian America is largely that of the second Christian America, the one that lost in the Civil War. Their hope for restoration is invested in a revivalism that is native to the South, although now spread nationwide. The efforts of revivalism are typically fervent, fragmented, and lacking in intellectual coherence. If the heirs of the first Christian America—grounded in the New England story of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism, of principled argument and confident tradition—are largely missing from action today, their work is being done, to the extent it is being done, by Catholics and Reformed Protestants, pretty much as Fr. Murray foresaw (although he missed the Reformed Protestant part).

These things must be kept in mind when you hear some of us contending that America is, however ambiguously and complicatedly, a Christian society. It is a great contribution of Mark Noll's work, and especially of *America's God*, that it alerts us to the fact that there are others who, when they hear the mention of Christian America, respond, "Ah yes, I remember it well."

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## WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ I recently noted the full court press that the Society of Jesus is applying in support of homosexuality and gay priests. The campaign continues with the March issue of *Theological Studies*, the academic journal published by the Jesuits. Three articles frontally attack the Church's teaching on sexuality and marriage. In "The Open Debate: Moral Theology and the Lives of Gay and Lesbian Persons," Father James F. Keenan, professor of moral theology at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Massachusetts, leaves no doubt that he thinks it is a legitimate debate and it is wide open. He cites numerous gay and gay-friendly Catholic thinkers who agree with him. "[I]n comparison to the other Christian churches, the Vatican's position has changed only a little even though a lively debate exists within the Church at every other level. The Vatican's teaching remains so because its contemporary exponents privilege as a condition of truthfulness a teaching's unchanged status." Put differently, the

"contemporary exponents," including John Paul II and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, impermissibly "privilege" their view on the odd assumption that two millennia of consistent Christian teaching has something to do with truth. The authors whom Keenan favorably cites challenge the reluctance of the late moral theologian, Richard McCormick, to affirm that the homosexual condition and homogenital acts are "good and normal." McCormick has been outdated by developments that, writes Xavier Seubert, "initially appear threatening and disruptive" but lead to a recognition that "homosexuality can be a new name for its own embodying manifestation of Godlife." John Paul's extensive writings on nuptial sexuality are criticized for "privileging gender complementarity and providing grounds for excluding the moral validity of expressed same-sex love." Homosexuality was once viewed in terms of inversion, and Keenan is taken with the suggestion that we should find consolation "in God's revolutionary movements of inverting all things." He concludes his reflection with this: "The open debate is an extensive one, occurring throughout the Catholic world. As they engage in this debate, moral theologians do not superficially validate personal lifestyles but rather propose a variety of criteria for assessing the morality of the way ordinary gay and lesbian persons live their lives. The debate helps us to see, then, that the Catholic tradition is rich, human, and capable of being relevant to help gay and lesbian persons find moral ways of living out their lives and the ways they are called to love. Gay and lesbian persons respond offering, from their experience, a variety of ways of imagining not only their own self-understanding, but the way we are called to be Church. Like other groups of people who have been oppressed by, among others, the Church, they help us to see that by silencing and marginalizing them, we do harm to them, ourselves, the Church, and the gospel." Now if only the current exponents of "the Vatican's teaching" could get over their habit of privileging Scripture and tradition in order to overdetermine the "truth" about human sexuality.

■ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Dvesti let Vmeste (1795-1995) (Two Hundred Years Together)* has yet to appear in English, but Daniel J. Mahoney has a splendid review essay on the first volume in *Society*. The "together" in the title refers to Russians and Jews, and Mahoney convincingly rebuts the slander that Solzhenitsyn's Russian patriotism entails a form of anti-Semitism. At the same time, Solzhenitsyn does not evade questions that some will not touch for fear of being charged with anti-Semitism. Mahoney writes: "Any adequate treatment of the Russian 'Jewish question' must sooner or later confront the difficult question of

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Pope." The Pope, he says, is something of a mystic but "[he] misses the opportunity of discovering that the mystery of life is even more beautiful than the beauty of the Church. That life as such is beautiful and warm, and that we don't need any mediator . . . like Jesus Christ, dying for our sins on the cross. Life doesn't need that. But life doesn't claim as much because life is over when you die." Duffy, it seems, is no longer a Catholic or a Christian, and he rather resents the fact that the Pope is. "You can't claim that Jesus rose from the dead if he didn't, historically speaking," says Duffy. "You cannot develop the world of dreams. You have to go back to reality. . . . That's what I call the mystery of life. And I think saying that there will be no resurrection for us makes life richer, gets all our power back from heaven to this earth. . . . I'm glad that I have found a way, or a way has been given to me, to get out of that building of the Church and move on to a universe which may be cold, but which has an enormous reach and is endless and has enormous promise." Duffy complains about the Pope's position on the ordination of women and his insistence upon priestly celibacy, but his deeper complaint is that he is "popularity, encouraging others to do likewise." I have taken a long journey from a devout believer to a skeptic," he says. He describes himself as a theologian who, "having given up all the promises of the Christian faith, having given up resurrection and eternal life," is now a man "who's proud to be on this earth and who sees the beauty of this earth." The interview makes for very sad reading. Eamon Duffy is a historian of great talents, with a gift for illuminating unsuspected aspects of the past. One cannot help but wonder at how fragile must have been the props of a faith that collapsed into such banalities. Pray for him.

■ The 223 Catholic colleges and universities in the country are, like most colleges and universities, constantly examining themselves, comparing themselves with other (mostly elite) institutions, and devising and revising "mission statements." As odd as it may seem, the one question that usually doesn't get asked is how they're doing in proposing to their students the challenge of Catholic faith and life. In 1998, Father James Burtchaell published his invaluable *The Dying of the Light*, showing the ways in which Catholic and other religious colleges have—bit by bit and sometimes at a gallop—abandoned their constituting purpose. A decade ago, John Paul II issued *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (From the Heart of the Church), laying out a course of renewal for Catholic colleges that are serious about being Catholic. Now the Cardinal Newman Society and *Catholic World Report* have commissioned a study of thirty-eight fairly

representative Catholic colleges and universities, conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. The findings make for grim reading. On moral teachings (abortion, homosexuality, casual sex) and in sacramental observance, entering freshmen are dramatically less Catholic by the time they are seniors. (The sobering details are laid out in the March issue of *CWR*.) The study was widely reported in newspapers and elicited some unsurprising reactions. Monika Hellwig, for instance, is president of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities and a strong opponent of what she views as *Ex Corde's* threat to academic freedom. There isn't all that much that Catholic schools can do, she suggests. "Students look at movies, at their friends, at their families, at everything around them, and that doesn't mean Catholic colleges are failing." I'm not sure what she is saying. That students would be more Catholic if they didn't look at movies, friends, families, and everything else? Maybe Ms. Hellwig does think that, for her view of what it means to be Catholic seems terribly constricting. She says, "The question is whether the task of higher education in our pluralistic, changing society is to lock students into rules—or to give them the tools to understand, means being locked into rules." The problem is, it would seem, that colleges have all these freshmen coming in with their rigid indoctrination, victims of authoritarian catechesis, mindless ciphers locked into traditional rules, and the college's task is to liberate them by teaching them "critical thinking." And what should they think critically about if not the Catholicism by which they are, whether they know it or not, oppressed? Never mind that most entering freshmen today are thoroughgoing relativists who have but the slightest the Christian, and specifically Catholic, intellectual tradition is the richest and most adventuresome known to man. By comparison with that tradition, modernity's notion of "critical thinking" is pretty thin gruel. For Ms. Hellwig and others who think in conformity to the stereotype of the ghettoized Catholic mind of fifty years ago, however, Catholicism is the problem from which higher education is the escape. The alternative to that way of thinking is the daunting challenge proposed by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Some astute observers believe that, of the 223 nominally Catholic colleges and universities in the country, perhaps as many as a third are so alienated from their constituting purpose that they are safely beyond the reach of the sparks of renewal. Some will go out of business, others will drop all pretense of being Catholic or even of being, as many say today, "in the Catholic tradition" (or, in some cases, "in the Jesuit tradition"). Many

others, however, are engaged in earnest conversation about strengthening their "Catholic identity," and are edging up to the conclusion that Catholic identity involves being identifiably Catholic. Especially in theology and philosophy departments, there is powerful resistance by tenured refugees from what they call "the pre-Vatican II Church." They view *Ex Conde Ecclesiae* as an attempt to reverse the putative liberation that is the story of their lives. They are the entrenched defenders of the status quo. Arrayed against their hold on so much Catholic higher education are the sure but painfully slow remedies of retirement and mortality. And efforts such as the Cardinal Newman Society with its students who have learned to think critically about the "critical thinking" that stands between them and the high intellectual and spiritual adventure of a Catholic education.

■ *Newdow II* is the decision of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals not to reconsider *Newdow I*, which declared the public school voluntary recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, with its reference to a nation "under God," to be an unconstitutional establishment of religion. This led to a predictable, and perfectly understandable, public outcry, and it is expected that the first decision by a two-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit will be reversed by the U.S. Supreme Court. In the latest round, Judge Diarmuid F. O'Scannlain, joined by five other judges, wrote a forceful dissent. After reviewing the convoluted precedents of the courts on church-state questions, he writes: "But *Newdow II* goes further, and confers a favored status on atheism in our public life. In a society with a pervasive public sector, our public schools are a most important means for transmitting ideas and values to future generations. The silence the majority commands is *not* neutral—it itself conveys a powerful message, and creates a distorted impression about the place of religion in our national life. The absolute prohibition on any mention of God in our schools creates a bias *against* religion. The panel majority cannot credibly advance the notion that *Newdow II* is neutral with respect to belief versus nonbelief; it affirmatively favors the latter to the former. One wonders, does atheism become the default religion protected by the Establishment Clause?" William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, says strong action is called for: "It is up to the teachers in the nine western states affected by this decision to break the law: they should instruct their students on the meaning of civil disobedience and then practice it. All they need to do is call the cops and local TV reporters and then recite the Pledge of Allegiance in their presence. It needs to be shown on television all over the world that as the U.S. prepares to go to war to maintain the liberties symbolized in the

Pledge, there are brave men, women, and children at home who are prepared to fight tyranny on our own soil." Civil disobedience is serious business, and I'm not sure students should be encouraged to break the law in protest against lawless courts. *Newdow* probably would not reach a purely student-initiated and student-led recitation of the Pledge, however, and that might be the best response until the Supreme Court gets around to overruling the secularist fanatics on the Ninth Circuit.

■ Always of interest are the views of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. After the Pope, he is the most important guardian of the Church's teaching. In a recent interview he addressed the Christian foundation of European culture, how the pontificate of John Paul II might be viewed by history, and the Church's relationship with other religions. On the meaning of Europe: "I am convinced that Europe must not just be something economic [or] political; rather, it is in need of spiritual foundations. It is a historical fact that Europe is Christian, and that it has grown on the foundation of the Christian faith, which continues to be the foundation of the values for this continent, which in turn has influenced other continents. It is imperative to have a foundation of values and, if we ask ourselves what that foundation is, we realize that, beyond the confessions, there are no others outside the great values of the Christian faith. And this is why it is imperative that in the future Constitution of Europe mention is made of the Christian foundations of Europe. I do not wish to fall into the error of constructing a political Catholicism. The faith does not provide political recipes, but indicates the foundations. On one hand, politics has its autonomy, but on the other there is no total separation between politics and faith. There are foundations of the faith that later allow for political reasoning. The question, therefore, is what are these foundations that will enable politics to function? What are the aspects that must be left free? In the first place, it is critical to have an anthropological moral vision, and here faith enlightens us. Is the person of God necessary to have this anthropological vision, which guarantees the freedom of political reasoning? A morality that dispenses with God [will] fragment. . . . Moreover [to mention God] is not an act of violence against anyone; it does not destroy anyone's freedom, but opens to all the free space to be able to construct a truly human, moral life." On the pontificate of John Paul II: "I am not a prophet; that is why I do not dare say what they will say in fifty years, but I think the fact that the Holy Father has been present in all areas of the Church will be extremely important. In this way,