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Last Safe Haven for Iraqi Christians Taken by Al-Qaeda

Deal W. Hudson | Column

10/13/08

"**N**ow the last safe haven for Christians is gone," said Canon Andrew White, the vicar of St. George's church in Baghdad. During the past week, twelve Christians have been killed and more than 3,000 have left the city of Mosul, once considered a safe zone for persecuted Iraqi Christians.

Mosul, on the plain of Nineveh in northern Iraq, has long been home to one of the largest remaining Christian communities in the nation. Furthermore, in recent years the city has been a destination for persecuted Christians.

Unfortunately, the safety of Mosul was only relative to the rest of Iraq, where Christians are in constant **danger** from Islamic extremists (including al-Qaeda). In February, in the most well publicized incident of anti-Christian persecution, Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul was kidnapped and killed. Still in possession of his cell phone, Rahho told his community not to pay the ransom being demanded for his return.

His Excellency Shlemon Wirduni, the auxiliary bishop of the Chaldean patriarch, received reports from Mosul that the assassins said they were murdering Iraqi Christians who "want an autonomous region." I recently **reported** on the effort of Chaldean bishops in the United States to lobby the Bush administration to support the creation of an autonomous area in the Nineveh Province to be administered by Christians.

The violence should not have been unexpected when **CNN** reported that, a week ago, leaflets distributed in several predominantly Christian neighborhoods contained threats that families should "either convert to Islam, or pay the *jizyah*, or leave the city, or face death." *Jizyah* is a tax paid by non-Muslims in exchange for protection -- the ransom Archbishop Rahho refused to allow to be paid for his life.

A few days later, checkpoints were set up in sections of Mosul where gunmen stopped vehicles and asked for identification papers in order to target Christians. According to one witness, some of the Christians killed were targeted in this way.

Hopes for more Christian participation in Iraqi politics were **dashed** recently when the Iraqi legislature voted to eliminate an article in the provincial election law guaranteeing a minimum level of Christian, and other minority, representation. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki immediately **asked** for the article's reinstatement, but not before Christian protests broke out in Mosul, Baghdad, Kirkuk, and elsewhere. The attacks against Iraqi Christians in Mosul **began** shortly after the protests started.

Chaldean leaders in the United States are alarmed by the increasing level of violence against Iraqi Christians *in spite* of both Iraqi and U.S. government promises to provide greater protection. Joseph T. Kassab is executive director of the Chaldean Federation of America. Kassab asks, "Why are these innocent people getting murdered and pushed out from their homes? They always insisted on being loyal Iraqis first. The capitals of the world open their doors to them, but most choose to stay."

It is **estimated** that about half of Iraq's 900,000 Christians have now left the country, leaving the remainder vulnerable to daily harassment, persecution, and violence. Kassab wonders why the situation keeps growing worse: "We appeal to the world leaders and the international community to save innocent lives, to preserve security, and to allow the displaced families to live in peace in their ancestral land."

As **reported** by McClatchey, Governor Kashmoula said the Christian deaths stem from the failure of security operations to control the movement of al-

Qaeda in the region. Said Kashmoula, "Killing the peaceful Christians is a crime, and it doesn't pass without punishment."

Unfortunately, the likelihood that the murderers of these twelve Iraqi Christians will ever be brought to justice is growing more remote, despite Iraqi and U.S. promises that the remaining Christian communities will receive more, rather than less, protection.

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Acting Pro-Life

Steve Skojec | Column

10/13/08

There is an elderly man in our parish whose self-appointed mission during Mass is to angrily harass any parent who *dares* to linger in the apse of the church for a second after his or her child begins to fuss. It's discouraging to see this sort of behavior in a parish with so many small children who are so unusually well-behaved. Ours is not a church where parents inconsiderately allow their children to lay under the pews, talk loudly, or throw cheerios. Any misbehavior is dealt with promptly and efficiently by conscientious mothers and fathers, and noisy children are quickly ushered out the back of the church.

One Sunday, when my wife and I were subjected to this tyrant's scorn, another parent leaned in and whispered, "And *he's* the head of our parish *pro-life* committee." If true, maybe no one ever informed him that the background noise of fussing babies, children pointing out in too-loud voices ("That's *Jesus* mommy! That's *Mary!*") and yes, even the Doppler effect provided by a screaming toddler being whisked away from the apse, is what an *actually* pro-life parish sounds like. Total silence is found only in the monastery or the tomb.

This raises an important question: What does being pro-life mean to us and how should it make us act? Is it simply a political philosophy or a cause for activism? Does it influence the way we live or is it just something to which we pay lip service?

I recently moved my family into a new house, much closer to the city. After we settled in, I began noticing on my daily commute that there were abortion protestors outside an office building just around the corner. I stopped by one day and when I asked the name of the facility, one of the group deadpanned (quite seriously): "Some call it the 'Slaughterhouse.' Some call it the 'Whorehouse of Death!'"

He then launched, unsolicited, into a story about how a clinic shut down in Cleveland had been filled with witchcraft paraphernalia, finishing with a supposition that they were "probably worshipping Satan or something."

I have great admiration and respect for those who give generously of their time to pray in front of abortion clinics or volunteer on pro-life committees, but is this the sort of impression we want the world to have of pro-lifers -- that we're so angry that we lack basic tact, charity, and common sense?

Americans have been stuck with legalized abortion for so long that I'm beginning to think we've lost our sense of direction. We recognize, on the one hand, that our nation is perpetuating an atrocity that makes the gulags of Stalin and the concentration camps of Hitler pale in comparison. On the other hand, we feel powerless to do anything about it, and so are compelled to go on with our daily lives as though everything is normal. This state of perpetual tension cannot be sustained; maybe it's no surprise that it drives some of us to the brink of madness -- or at least to the abandonment of good sense.

It is also perhaps the reason why we spend so much time and energy looking for political solutions to the crisis -- because it makes us feel as though we're accomplishing something. Of course, the unfortunate fact is that lasting political solutions will never be had until we begin winning victories in the culture war. In a country where the majority of citizens believe that abortion in some form should be legal, pinning all our hopes on a presidential election or Supreme Court nomination is an exercise in extreme wishful thinking. We need to win converts and forge friendships with those who disagree with us and must find ways to *effectively* persuade our opponents. Hoping to simply change the law skirts the issue -- ending abortion will require winning the battle for hearts and minds long

before we can expect to make true progress at the ballot box.

I had a conversation recently with a husband and father of five who has spent most of the past decade working in politics. He shared an insight which I found tremendously sensible:

The best way for me to be pro-life isn't to be an activist, but to devote as much effort as I can to being the best father I can to my children. It's when my wife takes the kids to the grocery store and faces down the nasty stares. If we're going to have any hope, it's going to be our children. They're the ones who will have a chance to be the leaven. It's our job to build the foundation.

We need activists and we need politics, but even more than that, we need strong *families* -- families to serve as examples of the beauty of life and the goodness of God's plan. We each have a role to play in

fighting that battle. For some of us, that involves simply living out the marital, parental vocation.

The most effective warriors for life are those who haven't lost sight of what being pro-life really means: loving and welcoming children into our families, even though it entails sacrifice; being supportive of others who have children, rather than wishing they'd go somewhere else for Mass; and speaking charitably to (and about) our enemies, and remembering to pray for them.

If we're going to win this fight, we must be personal examples of the pro-life culture, even if we've never seen the sidewalk outside an abortion clinic.

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Lust for the Suburbs

John Zmirak | Column

10/14/08

Of the seven areas of life where Jesus spoils our fun, the subject of sex is one where He actually does least harm. Wistful, liberal Catholics like to point out that Christ spent much more time on earth denouncing the smugly rich than the randy. As usual, these people are missing the point: When it came to sexuality, Christ didn't *need* to make matters much worse for us poor, fallen primates. Now, the light of the Resurrection -- the high beam that the Church, it seems, doesn't know how to shut off -- does show up the shabbiness of man's very best sexual shortcuts, like divorce, polygamy, and fantasy. We squint a bit, zip up, and stare down at our shoes.

But Creation was already painful enough; Redemption simply tightened a couple of screws, so we couldn't squirm out of the dilemma posed by sex: We want it to serve our day-to-day personal happiness, and it wants to do something else entirely. In the "fallen" state that we received this hand-me-down, the sex instinct is less like a tool we use to build our home than the tectonic plate that rumbles underneath it.

I know, the standard account of what moralists have always (through clenched teeth) described as Lust is that it's the inordinate, excessive, or misdirected desire for sexual pleasure. Okay, whatever. That sounds like it only applies to the kind of guy who spends his days downloading videos of Japanese girls in Catholic school uniforms, or to slick lotharios who run around breaking hearts and "home-wrecking" trophy wives. If those were the only people whose cravings were "inordinate," the rest of us could kick back and find happiness doing what comes naturally.

Yeah, that works real well. See you in Family Court. (I can't wait for the long-delayed launch of EWTN-2, its entertainment channel. I've applied to produce their first reality show, *Annulment Court*. "Live from the Roman Rota . . .")

What's more, the old, moralistic account understates what we seek from sex. If what you want is short-term pleasure, ecstatic moments of seamy bliss -- hey, it's out there. But not even teenage boys are long satisfied with that. Neo-Victorian **chastity advocates** are fooling themselves when they claim that women look for love, but their quest for lifelong tenderness is frustrated by men. (Who, by the way, are beasts.) If that were true, then the sexes really would be natural enemies, doomed to mate -- cobras and mongooses who called an occasional truce so they could "hook up."

No, we're looking for something much more elusive than pleasure. What we want is Happiness -- day-to-day satisfaction, order and quiet, leisure time, regular bouts of pleasure, and peaceful companionship. That's what we "lust" for -- and battle nature, tooth and claw, trying to get.

Now, those of you who are happily married, with a sexual relationship that's satisfying and untroubled, who find no difficulty balancing the fleshly cravings and fathomless feelings of two human beings . . . well, I'm not talking to you.

Y'all who put the Theology of the Body into practice, who cheerfully welcome the gift of new life whenever it explodes into your home -- or who find it painless, for "just and rational reasons," to practice natural family planning . . . well, why don't you just skip this article, m'kay? Just go on back to your houseful of little von Trapps and teach the kids to sing another Mozart opera, or build a miniature Chartres in the yard out of popsicle sticks. Go on, scoot!

For some of us -- for instance, a goodly slice of unmarried males -- when we hear chipper sermons that call sexuality "one of God's greatest gifts," we

smile thinly and try not to snark back: "Where's the counter where I can go exchange it? Like, for a sweater?"

I don't think I'm lapsing into Gnosticism when I say that, for much of mankind, sexuality is less like a big, shiny present left for us by a loving Father than a dose of poison ivy that lasts for decades -- and it's a mortal sin to scratch. In the modern West, most of us mature so slowly that marriage before the age of 30 seems almost suicidally rash. You can't support a family on one income, and children need decades and decades of expensive education before they can move briefly out of your home -- then return to live on your couch while they "figure things out."

Things weren't always so impossible. Some of the problems here are the side-effects of technology -- by which I mean machines that help us do what we want. Which frequently blows up in our face, since *what we want* -- and let me emphasize this, because it seems to be essential to understanding Creation -- *is entirely beside the point*.

The natural order is blithely unconcerned with our happiness; our bodies are built with the family's -- and, hence, the species' -- best interest in mind. So, by nature, we barrel bedward with all the zest of salmon swimming upstream to spawn. With the same results. Have you ever seen the battered state of those fish at the end of their selfless, frantic fight against the current, over rocks, up hills, and over dams -- their tattered skin, broken fins, and glassy stares? They look like parents emerging, drained and dazed, from [Chuck E. Cheese](#).

No wonder modern man, having figured out biological means to skip that whole, exhausting slog, prefers to live in a fish farm. We'd rather subsist like those shiny, bloated salmon that slurp around in corporate hatcheries, chowing down on niblets of corn, staying healthy with regular doses of hormones and antibiotics, and using red dye No. 2 to keep our flesh nice and pink. We may not build up all those healthy Omega nutrients that the authorities say would make us "better fish." Our offspring are fewer, but fatter. We

might not turn out as complex, or courageous -- but our "effort to pleasure" ratio is a whole lot better.

In the "old days" -- and still today in countries that don't have air conditioning or bear examining -- we didn't face this tempting choice. Nor was unassuageable sexual frustration the normal state for men and women, for decades running. People's sexual maturity pretty much launched them into a state historians refer to as "adulthood." People got randy, so they got married. Children worked from a young age at tasks on the farm or in family shops and learned skills that put them in good stead to feed and house the little ones they would soon enough be producing. Parents saw in additional offspring extra hands to help around the household, whose labor would more than compensate the cost of their upkeep. What is more, the children they raised would be their mainstay and support when they grew too old to work. Sure, sometimes boys and girls would get into mischief before they were married -- but that's why God made shotguns.

Men were still disposed by their fallen nature toward polygamy -- but most of them could barely support a single wife, so the point was moot. Divorce entailed disgrace, but men and women alike knew that a wife's chance of dying in childbirth was one in three -- so each had some reason for hope. Fertility was pretty much out of our hands, but it was kept in balance by the old-school method of natural family planning: infant mortality.

It's true that the women aged pretty quickly. (In the blue-collar neighborhood where I come from, brides still seem to gain 50 pounds at the reception.) But on a diet of turnips and potatoes, spiced with the occasional slow-moving weasel and washed down by vodka, the men didn't exactly mellow like Paul Newman, either. Indeed, by age 25, pretty much everyone looked like something out of a [Brueghel](#) painting, and by 30 they became a lot of [Bosch](#). Five more years, and most of them died. So it all worked pretty well.

At least, there was a certain harmony between the desires of the average man, the culture in which he lived, and the natural order (the needs of the species). The whole structure of things -- from regular famines to periodic invasions by Asiatic hordes -- made clear to nearly everyone just how high in the cosmic hierarchy his own desires ranked.

It's not surprising that, as soon as we could figure out how to rebel against such an arrangement, we would. And, as usual, we didn't know where to stop.

As late as 1920, contraception was mostly used by prostitutes. By 1968, it was the norm among married Catholics. This wasn't so much an explosion of unfathomable evil as a giddy attempt to tame biology and make it "play nice" with our desires. And now we're finding out that, as usual, nature wins -- if only by default, as wild salmon outbreed us farm-fed fish. In 50 years, demographers predict, Europe will be largely populated by Muslims -- who, I predict, will by then have a birth rate of 1.2.

There are plenty of [cultural conservatives](#), and many Catholics, who'd like to see us return to a more natural way of life. They urge us back to the land, to renounce not just contraceptives but Botox, iPods, and maybe Novocain. But most of us won't go willingly. If it turns out that the geniuses running our banks and bureaucracies really *have* plunged our continent back to the status quo of, say, 1492, I will make my final pilgrimage back to the Holy City. I'll climb the stairs of the Chrysler Building, bring along my laptop, and I'll keep on watching YouTube till the Wi-Fi flickers out.

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Pope Pius XII

Rev. George W. Rutler | Column

10/14/08

Two weeks ago, I promised to lay out for you, one week **In dire days of the last dark world war**, one man said after a papal audience: "Pius XII judges everything from a perspective that surpasses human beings, their undertakings and their quarrels. . . . Pious, compassionate, political -- such does this pontiff and sovereign appear to me because of the respect that he inspires in me." That was the assessment of General Charles de Gaulle, who was thrifty in his praise of men. To the outrage of the Vichy government, the pope had received him as head of the new provisional government in June of 1944, even before the liberation of France.

As a child, Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli was moved when an uncle told him of a missionary who been crucified. He said that he wanted to be a martyr but "without the nails." The man the child became learned that there are different kinds of crucifixions and various sorts of nails, and he suffered in untold ways in a tortured world, bearing witness to the words of the Prince of the Apostles:

Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil (1 Pet 3:15-17).

His crucifixion without nails began when the mannerly diplomat met face-to-face with Evil, who has two faces and hides one. Through trials Pacelli learned that the strengths of diplomacy can weaken the apostle, which is why the only one of the Twelve to destroy himself was all diplomat and no apostle. Forged in earnestness by Pius XI, who was no friend to subtlety, Pacelli constantly mortified his aesthetic desire to imagine things that should be as if they were.

He was consecrated a bishop on the day the Mother of God first appeared at Fatima with her prediction of calamities. He knew that optimism as a wish is not hope as a virtue, and that the spiritual combat is not without paradoxes. While his papal coat of arms showed a dove with an olive branch, he instructed the halberded Swiss Guard during the Nazi occupation of Rome to carry machine guns. With bags packed should he be dragged away in a venerable tradition from Maximinus to Napoleon, he marked the line between bravery and bravado and martial prudence to save lives when impetuosity would have cost more. The Chief Rabbi of Romania said in the exhausted year of 1945: "The Catholic Church saved more Jewish lives during the war than all other churches, religious institutions and rescue organizations put together. Its record stands in startling contrast to the International Red Cross and the Western Democracies"

The faulty architecture of human history is postwar and prewar at the same time. Pius XII never doubted that, after a hot war, a cold war would be long. Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty was a symbol of the affliction of a new darkness, and the pope defended him with an uncompromising zeal that sustained the cardinal in later years when he felt bereft. The pope was satisfied that tyrants should die and closely followed attempts on the life of Hitler. As an incarnation of the tradition of immutable natural law, he concisely explained capital punishment: "Even in the case of the death penalty the State does not dispose of the individual's right to life. Rather, public authority limits itself to depriving the offender of the good of life in expiation for his guilt, after he, through his crime, deprived himself of his own right to life." His simultaneous impulse of mercy could be startling, as when he twice pleaded for clemency for the convicted spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg -- and, in an unprecedented act,

published his appeals to President Eisenhower in *L'Osservatore Romano*.

It is dangerous to play Monday-morning quarterback when taking the measure of a man's soul. In American-Indian lore, you can only know a man if you have walked in his moccasins. With a pope, this means walking in the Shoes of the Fisherman, and only a pope can do that. His was a rare voice in a world of immoral silence. Today that silence is deafening in those same institutions that, in those war years, ignored the progress of evil: the universities, the media, and the courts. No one who lives is subhuman: no baby,

however young, and no invalid, however old. To say that in our generation is to indict the academics, journalists, and jurists who stammer when the voice of God calls out, as in Eden: "Where are you?"

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Reading the Bible Like a Grown-Up

Mark P. Shea | Column

10/15/08

As we saw last week, antique atheists like Bill Maher still imagine that people who take the Bible seriously must read it literalistically, as he does. However, there is a difference between literalistic interpretation -- which is the habit of all fundamentalists, whether atheist or Christian -- and the literal sense of Scripture. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the literal sense this way:

The *literal sense* is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: "All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal" (CCC 116).

As we also saw last week, getting at the literal sense of Scripture involves not mindlessly chanting, "God said it; I believe it; that settles it" in the same way a Muslim shouts, "*Allahu akbar!*" but reading like an adult and distinguishing between the various literary forms by which Scripture reveals to us the one revelation who is Jesus Christ. It involves, in short, learning to discern *what the author was actually trying to assert*, the way he was trying to assert it, and *what is incidental* to that assertion.

So when an Old Testament writer tells me that the land of Canaan was "flowing with milk and honey," it does not mean that he believes a chemical analysis of the river Jordan would reveal a mixture of bovine glandular secretions and bee vomit. Rather, it means (obviously) that he knows the land of Canaan to be what it was: an agriculturally rich area where Israel could settle down and be very happy raising farms, flocks, and kidlets.

Fair enough. But, of course, Scripture says quite a lot of other things that involve real claims of the supernatural (or appear to). What do we make of them?

The first thing we have to do is wipe any sneers off our faces. Members of the Maher school of biblical criticism imagine they are being hard-headed thinkers when they reflexively reject the possibility of the miraculous. Their favorite slogan is, "Skepticism is the chastity of the intellect." The problem is that it's not true. Skepticism is, in fact, the *sterility* of the intellect, just as credulity is. Take either skepticism or credulity too far and you wind up thinking nonsense (as when Maher extends his skepticism to reject not just the unseen reality of God, but the unseen reality of disease-causing germs or a faith-healing devotee who chalks up every head cold to a demon). Or worse, you wind up not thinking at all, as when H. G. Wells's skepticism in his essay "Doubts of the Instrument" leads him to doubt whether he can know anything, or when the hyper-credulous person believes it when somebody says a 900-foot-tall Jesus appeared to Oral Roberts, demanding cash.

Reflexive skepticism and reflexive credulity are both enemies of the Catholic intellectual tradition, which counsels instead both reason and faith. The devil sends dogmatic skepticism and brainless credulity into the world as a pair so that, fearing one, we might flee to the other and be ensnared. Maher-esque skeptics, living in the delusional fear that millions of Christians credulously believe the Virgin appears regularly on grilled cheese sandwiches, run to the opposite extreme of refusing to acknowledge the miraculous even if it walks up and hits them in the face. Oh sure, they may talk a good game about their desire for "scientific proof," as Emile Zola did when he said he just wanted to see a cut finger dipped in Lourdes water and healed. But when confronted with a miracle (as Zola was by the miraculous healing of a tubercular woman whose half-destroyed face was healed after a bath at Lourdes), the dogmatic skeptic simply declares, as Zola did, "Were I to see all the sick at Lourdes cured, I would not believe in a miracle."

This is not reason. This is *unreason*: a dogmatic faith that miracles cannot happen that precedes and excludes any possible testimony to the miraculous, including the testimony of one's own two eyes.

The sane approach to the question of the supernatural is therefore to embrace a reasonable openness to the possibility of the supernatural combined with a sensible willingness to use the sense God gave a goose. In short, it's the same approach we use for determining all other matters of historical fact: Are the witnesses really trying to tell us a miracle occurred in actual human history, and are they reliable? Not all biblical documents are entirely clear about these questions, but as a general rule, it's not all that hard to tell them apart.

So, for instance, Jerome -- the greatest biblical scholar of antiquity -- tells us that the Creation story is written "after the manner of a popular poet" -- or, as we say today, in mythic language. This is a shock to the Mahers of the world, who just knew from listening to other like-minded Mahers of the world that ancient Christians took every syllable of Genesis literalistically.

On the other hand, Jerome does not poeticize when the biblical author obviously intends to be offering reportage of eyewitness accounts that are extremely close to the event. So when John tells us that Mary Magdalene saw the Risen Christ, and Thomas stood with his finger poised over the wound in the hands, feet, and side of His Glorified Body, Jerome knows perfectly well John means to say, "The man I saw crucified on Good Friday is the same man I saw alive

and well three days later. He is God in glorified human flesh!" Jerome knows that John is *not* saying, "Jesus was eaten by wild dogs and his carcass is now scattered across the Judean wilderness, but I am sublimating my guilt by concocting a messianic tale compounded of Israelite myth, rumors of Osiris, and the delusional gestalt of my and my half-crazed friends."

Jerome, like Paul, knows that if Christ is not raised as the apostles say, then the whole thing is a load of *skubala* and the apostles are a bunch of lying dirtbags (1 Cor 15:12-19). In short, Jerome knows the difference between mythic language and an eyewitness account. He can make the distinction and give each text the sort of assent it asks of him because, before he picked up the Bible, he had worked out a sensible philosophical approach to the question, "Do miracles happen?" The answer to that question, for anybody who is open to reason and not dogmatically committed to the unreasonable rejection of the supernatural, is "Yes."

Now the only question is, "How do you tell the difference between accounts of the miraculous and mere fictional tales?"

We'll answer that next week.

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Running the Church . . . Freddie Mac Style

T. Joseph Marier | Column

10/15/08

There was a brief controversy in the summer of 2003, when a group of liberal and progressive Catholic figures held a closed-door meeting to discuss Church matters with several high-level prelates, including Archbishop Wilton Gregory and Theodore Cardinal McCarrick. Deal W. Hudson and others at the time observed that the group had a number of well-known dissenters and yet no conservative Catholic voices, and was also unusually Boston-centric. A second and similar meeting was arranged between the same prelates and the conservative critics, and the matter was closed.

But that's not to say the matter was *ended*.

Geoffrey Boisi -- the leader of the original group -- eventually relaunched his organization with a press conference on March 14, 2005, under the mellifluous name the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management (NLRCM). The group meets yearly at the Wharton School of Business, issues annual reports, produces DVDs and instructional materials, gives out awards, develops Church management degrees for Catholic universities, and so on.

According to the most [recent article](#) on them in *Businessweek* -- yes, there was more than one; NLRCM has a talent for publicity -- one of the founding members was none other than former Freddie Mac CEO Richard Syron. In this case, he is "former" because, after five years of his governance, the U. S. government had to bail out and nationalize Freddie Mac to the tune of \$100 billion -- all in a perhaps-futile attempt to keep the world economy from capsizing.

Of course, you wouldn't know that Syron is involved in the Roundtable from the Web site: Go to the [Board of Directors](#), and he's not there. Look back in the archives, though, and you'll find him listed as a board member on a few of the annual reports.

And that's not his only membership. Syron is a longtime member of the Board of Trustees of Boston College, which was probably his main connection to the whole business in the first place (Boisi is a Trustee as well, and he and Syron [worked together](#) on choosing a new president of the college).

Obviously, Boston College is a Catholic institution, and Boisi's and Syron's broader interactions with the Boston Archdiocese appear to have been the impetus for the creation of NLRCM. It was already in the planning stages when the Long Lent of 2002 began, and the organization would eventually give the Archdiocese of Boston an award for following its recommendations.

Unfortunately, NLRCM is a creature of Boston, and that's a problem. As I was looking through NLRCM's ponderous material on Church governance, [one interesting detail](#) from a CNS article jumped out at me:

"Badly managed hospitals give you bad medical care," said Jesuit Father Donald Monan, chancellor and past president of Boston College, at the 2004 meeting. "Badly managed universities give you bad education. Badly managed court systems fail in justice. And badly managed churches, I think, begin to fail in their own mission."

He suggested dioceses could draw lessons from the experience of Catholic colleges and universities, almost all of which now rely on predominantly lay boards of trustees. He said the "performance culture" that such trustees bring to the institution "flows down from the board to the entire set of operations."

Entire dioceses run the way the trustees of Boston College run Boston College? Sounds like a promising idea, right?

Actually, it sounds a lot like Freddie Mac.

Bear with me: In the Boston College model, lay trustees run things, but the college has the implicit backing of the Catholic Church should they get into trouble. In the Freddie Mac model, shareholders and executives run things, but the enterprise has the implicit backing of the U. S. government. If they find themselves in a difficult situation, they get (ahem) bailed out. It's a pretty good deal for the trustees, the shareholders, and the executives -- but not so good for the people they serve.

Does this mean the NLRCM bears the stain of Syron forever, and should be shunned by all that is organizationally good and decent? Well, if their goal is to promote a Lay Trustee model of governance for the finance and personnel decisions of the dioceses of the Catholic Church, with the implicit backing of the Catholic Church, then yes. Episcopal governance is actually one of the marks of the Church, and at least in practice, the Lay Trustee model threatens that. It is true

that St. Ambrose was selected by lay acclamation, but he was never *vetoed* by the same, and *that* is the unique power of trustees. It does not fit well into the Church's governance model, and where it has been tried -- in Boston and elsewhere -- Catholic identity has been compromised.

The executives of Freddie Mac, including Richard Syron, played an interesting game over the years: When Congress demanded greater oversight, they hid behind their responsibilities to their shareholders. When the shareholders complained, they cited their congressional charter. That's the dynamic of an organization that serves two masters. Let's avoid creating a second master for the Church.

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What's Wrong with Failure?

Jeffrey Tucker | Column

10/16/08

As angry as many people were about the bailout of Wall Street, something else makes people just about as angry: falling stock prices. It is probably for this reason that Washington decided to take the risk and push one of the more outrageously extravagant spending programs in the history of the world. The benefits of rising stock portfolios are concentrated while the costs of a bailout are diffuse. In the political calculus, then, politicians were betting that they would come out ahead.

What's really at issue is a deeper problem that is culture-wide: the intolerance toward failure. We can't face it. It is probably a symptom of the economic boom during which all stocks go up, all bets pay off, all homes rise in value, and everyone is slightly richer today than yesterday and half as rich as tomorrow. You just can't lose. It was true in Tulipmania, the South Sea Bubble, and it has been true in the United States for some ten years or more.

This is the mentality that spreads throughout a society in which the drug of loose credit -- based not on savings but rather the paper products of a printing press -- spreads to every sector. Every investor is an amazing stock picker and every home buyer a financial genius. But the illusions don't stop there. The ethos of genius inflation permeates everyone and everything, so that there emerges a culture-wide resistance to the very notion that someone might not be up to snuff.

For an example, I'm thinking of the usual scene at soccer or baseball practices in the civic leagues. No matter what the kid does, there is always someone around to say, "Good job." Those two words are said tens of thousands of times during the sports season. Everything is a good job, and there are no bad jobs, no mistakes, and certainly no failures. Improvement is part of the structure of the universe, so of course there is no such thing as failure. If you do and do and do, you can't but improve.

So it is in economics and business during boom times. Every day is a profitable day. Every stock must go up. Every business is a success. There is no downside risk. All banks pay the big bucks to depositors, and they keep your money safe. The only risk is that by putting your money here rather than there, you are choosing something less profitable over something more profitable.

It's this way in school where the Lake Wobegone model ("all kids are above average") is universalized. If a kid makes a failing grade, there must be some explanation that lies outside the volition of the student himself. It is a "failing school," a bad teacher, or some circumstances in life that mysteriously conspired to prevent the student from achieving the high level of accomplishment that is his birthright.

It's true in our personal lives, too (an insight I owe to [Jorg Guido Hulsmann](#)). The freedom to fail has been replaced by the implacable human right to succeed in all walks of life. The words "mea maxima culpa" are unknown to us, and not only because they have been removed from the liturgy: It is because nothing is ever our fault, much less our most grievous fault.

Everyone else is to blame for any mistakes or conflicts. We are all personally infallible. Maybe you have noticed this. When was the last time you heard anyone say something like: "I was wrong to say X. I'm so sorry." Not lately? That's because we are all always right, always winners, always profitable. Anyone who denies the great truth is a lout. Anything that stands in the way must be smashed.

And so it is that masses of people, heavily invested in the stock market, were devastated to see their stocks reduced in a matter of days to a fraction of what they had been. They were aghast, as if some principle of

natural law had been violated, and so someone should just wave a magic wand to make the problem go away. The Bush administration was there to wave away the issue with its magic printing press.

But is it really gone? Is there such a thing as markets that are only profitable and never present a downside risk? It's ridiculous. The whole idea of profit is bound up with the undeniable reality of uncertainty; profits accrue to institutions and individuals that are better able to act in the face of an uncertain future than others. If there were no downside risk to life, there would be no upside, either.

But in inflationary times, we are tempted to believe that we can have all the success we want and none of the failure. So the entire country is filled with people wailing and whining about their devastating stocks losses, pretending as if they had no idea that there might be a downside to keeping (I should say *spending*) all their savings on stocks or homes.

The stock market collapse has even been likened unto 9-11, as if it were an act violence. The tone of the response has been that bailouts are a simple matter of justice and morality, the same as punishing terrorists. We only need to "get tough" on whatever forces led us

to this regrettable situation (which was imposed from the outside).

In fact, falling stocks are an extension of human preferences -- real flesh-and-blood choices made in the marketplace in response to the dawning of reality. But tell that to your dinner party guests -- you'll have a roll thrown at your face. An inflationary culture can't handle the truth. So we will march to the polls soon and vote for whomever tells the most compelling lies. The paper that made the boom has turned the stuff in our brains to papier-mâché.

Don't throw a roll, but here is the bitter reality: The bust is good. It is needed. It will right our economic structures. It could also help repair the damage that inflationary credit has done to our outlook on life. Maybe in the future, instead of expecting someone to yell "good job" at everything we do, we will learn to see merit to recognizing that we are not so hot at everything in life.

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Texas Bishops Face Protests from Pro-Abortion Catholics

Deal W. Hudson | Column

10/16/08

When is the last time a bishop's statement on abortion resulted in several days of protest from pro-abortion Catholics? The joint [statement](#) issued last Friday by Bishop Kevin Vann of Fort Worth and Bishop Kevin Farrell of Dallas has done just that. No doubt the forceful clarity of the bishops' message elicited the outcry.

The protests began on Sunday when the statement was read from the pulpit by Rev. Tony Ruiz, pastor of Holy Trinity Catholic Church in downtown Dallas. Some two-dozen parishioners walked out and went to the local media to lodge their complaints about "political endorsements."

The next day, the *Dallas Morning News* carried the [story](#) on the front page of its Metro section. "The silver lining was that the article contained a link to the bishops' statement," said Karen Garnett, executive director of the Catholic Pro-Life Committee, Respect Life Ministry of the Diocese of Dallas.

Garnett told me that the subsequent protest on Wednesday afternoon in front of the diocesan chancery attracted the same number of people who had walked out of the Mass at Holy Trinity. Bishop Farrell, who was out of town on Wednesday, has offered to meet with the protesters.

"Too many parishes do seminars on 'Faithful Citizenship' that don't put the life issues first. We've been dealing with that problem for 35 years," added Garnett.

Olivia Franklin, a member of Holy Trinity for 15 years, heard Father Ruiz read the statement. "I'm thrilled that he read it, and I hurried out the door to tell him thank you. This is the truth, and we need to hear the truth."

Franklin had recently attended four seminars at Holy Trinity on "Faithful Citizenship." At these sessions she was told "one could in fact vote for a pro-abortion candidate if one was not voting for them for that reason." She raised objections to what was being taught, only to be told it was just her opinion.

There have been over 40 [statements](#) to date issued by bishops this election season. Some responded to comments made by Sen. Barack Obama's running mate, Sen. Joe Biden, about the beginning of human life. Others responded to Speaker Nancy Pelosi's appearance on *Meet the Press* when she, too, misrepresented the Church's teaching on abortion.

But the biggest problem of this election for Catholics has been the bishops' own [document](#), "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship." In an otherwise admirable document, there is one section (Sec. 34-37) that has provided an open door for pro-abortion Catholics to drive through and proclaim their support for Obama, a proponent of abortion-on-demand. (I have already [written](#) about the effort to use "Faithful Citizenship" to help Obama.)

One of the problematic passages in "Faithful Citizenship" presently being spun by Obama's Catholic supporters is the following:

35. There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons.

Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil.

Bishops Vann and Farrell demolish the arguments of leading Obama Catholic surrogate Doug [Kmiec](#) and others, that "Faithful Citizenship" can be interpreted to support Obama in the present election.

Bishops Vann and Farrell explain that voting for a candidate who supports an intrinsic evil like abortion is possible only if 1) "both candidates running for office support abortion or 'abortion rights,'" or if 2) "another intrinsic evil outweighs the evil of abortion."

Obama's Catholic apologists argue such a situation exists with Sen. John McCain, citing his support for the Iraq War. Bishops Vann and Farrell reject this line of reasoning in advance, saying "there are no 'truly grave moral' or 'proportionate' reasons, singularly or combined, that could outweigh the millions of innocent human lives that are directly killed by legal abortion each year."

Olivia Franklin believes God is using the bishops' statement and the controversy at Holy Trinity. "For too long authentic Catholic social teaching has been co-opted by the 'social justice' crowd, who rail about the death penalty while conveniently ignoring the real death penalty presently being carried out -- the 4,000 babies executed daily by abortionists."

Deal W. Hudson is the director of [InsideCatholic.com](#) and the author of [Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States](#) (Simon and Schuster).

Gift of Grace

Danielle Bean | Column

10/17/08

"The juice! Don't forget the juice!" my mother-in-law, Dolores, called after me as I made my way down her front steps and toward my car.

Her anxious face appeared in the doorway and she thrust a half-gallon bottle of cranberry juice toward me.

I didn't want the stupid juice.

"Thank you," I answered weakly. I tucked the bottle under the passenger seat of the car and headed toward home -- the tiny apartment where my husband was waiting for me.

My husband. As a young bride, it still felt strange to put those two words together. In fact, the newness of my marriage was the reason I had trouble accepting gifts of cranberry juice from the in-laws.

Even as I was learning how to be a wife, Dan's mom was learning how to be the second woman in her son's life. And like any good mother, she didn't let go easily.

She still called to check on him, offered to do his laundry, and bought him all his favorite items at the grocery store. Which included, of course, the cranberry juice.

I was trying so hard to establish my own independence as a married woman that I resented my mother-in-law's well-intentioned involvement. Young, stubborn, and defensive as I was, I saw an innocuous bottle of beverage as a threat to the autonomy of my marriage.

But I acquiesced. I brought the juice home to our apartment and placed it in the refrigerator where I resented its very presence.

I don't remember if Dan drank the juice. I suppose he did. But I do remember thinking of the juice weeks later, after Dan's mother suffered a debilitating stroke.

She would never buy cranberry juice again.

Though Dolores lived for two more years before finally succumbing to lung cancer, in the meantime she lost her memory and failed to recognize even her closest family members. My mother-in-law, a woman who had devoted her life to the care of her family, became unable to care for herself. She who had loved her own son so fiercely that she struggled with letting him go -- she never knew that she became a Grandma.

In light of these events, resenting a bottle of cranberry juice seemed just a little bit silly. And selfish.

Although it's been twelve years since we lost Dan's mom, I still think of the cranberry juice on occasion. The most recent time was a couple of weeks ago.

Three-year-old Raphael has somehow come to misunderstand the purpose of saying grace. No matter how mightily we try, we fail to convince him that we say grace to bless our food and give thanks to God. He believes that grace is a magic formula we use to cool off foods that are too hot to eat.

And so it was at a recent lunchtime that Raphael insisted upon saying grace twice over his steaming bowl of macaroni and cheese. When we were through and he found that the food was still hot, he demanded that we say grace again. Having indulged him once, though, I was weary of the game.

"We've already said grace," I told him. "Blow on your macaroni to cool it off."

He threw himself onto the floor in a rage.

"Grace! Grace! Grace!" he shouted as furious fists beat the wooden floor.

This behavior surely did not warrant special favors. I was ready to scoop up his screaming body and deposit him in another room, when his older brother intervened.

"I'll say grace again," Eamon offered.

Raphael brushed himself off, returned to his chair, sniffed righteously in my direction, and said grace with his brother.

Witnessing this undeserved gift of grace, my mind filled with thoughts of cranberry juice and regret. As I listened to my boys' voices repeat the familiar words, I thought that this is what grace is. Undeserved and yet freely given, it is goodness and generosity poured out on the poorest, weakest of souls.

I whispered a prayer for the soul of a generous woman who loved my husband and me in ways I was once too childish to appreciate and I thanked God for all of His gifts. Even the ones I don't ask for, and especially the ones I don't deserve.

Danielle Bean, a mother of eight, is senior editor of Faith & Family magazine and author of My Cup of Tea: Musings of a Catholic Mom (Pauline 2005) and Mom to Mom, Day to Day: Advice and Support for Catholic Living (Pauline 2007). Visit her blog at www.daniellebean.com.

The Debt We Owe to Trade

Jeffrey Tucker | Review

10/11/08

A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World

William J. Bernstein, Atlantic Monthly Press, 494 pages, \$30

It was the year 1600 and coffee had become wildly popular all over Europe, just as it had been popular all over the Muslim world since its discovery 900 years earlier. The sitting pope was Clement VIII. His advisers urged him to do something to stop the coffee mania then spreading across Christendom. He tasted the coffee, reflected on its properties, and then, to the astonishment of his advisors, blessed it as a Christian beverage.

Long live the pope!

Matters weren't so simple in the Protestant world. The beverage was still a raging controversy in parts of Germany in the 18th century, as J. S. Bach's hilarious "Coffee Cantata" demonstrates.

The story, which is apparently true from all the checking I've done, appears on page 247 of a marvelous book that covers not only the expansion of the coffee trade but all trade of all goods and services from the stone age to the present day, and does so in a marvelously intriguing way. The book is *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World*, by William J. Bernstein. The book is long -- 494 pages -- but engaging on every page.

After finishing the book, I found myself thinking about its contents constantly. Its subject is so ubiquitous that it is hardly ever closely analyzed. The time period stretches from age to age; the geography covers the planet; and the items covered include spices, coffee, silk, pigs and pork, precious metals, oil, and, really, just about everything else. Bernstein demonstrates thousands of times that the world as we know it would be unrecognizable without trade, and shows that trade has shaped who we are in ways that none of us fully recognizes. The historical detail is

amazing. The writing is scholarly but clear and fascinating on every page.

Try to imagine Italian cuisine without the tomato, the highlands around Darjeeling without tea plants, an American table without wheat bread or beef, a café anywhere in the world beyond coffee's birthplace in Yemen, or German cooking without the potato.

Such was the world prior to 1492, before billions of acres of farmland were taken over with farming species from remote lands. It is not part of natural law. It was a result of deliberation and work. Fantastic economic and physical risks were involved. It is one of the ways in which the garden of this world has been tilled and kept by mankind, inch by inch.

The Bernstein book helps keep all the controversy about globalization in context. There is absolutely nothing new about globalization. Nothing. The progress of "globalization" has been on its current trajectory for the whole of recorded history. This trade has made the world ever more prosperous. And why? Because trade has permitted populations across the globe to cooperate to their mutual betterment. Without trade, the human population would shrink and most all of us would die. Even a slight curtailment of trade can bring on economic depression and dramatically shrink our standards of living.

It is one of the great failings of the human race that we tend to regard the wealth that surrounds us as a given, something that is just part of the world that will last forever and requires no work to acquire. Part of the reason we have this habit of mind is our general tendency to contemplate only what we experience in

our lifetimes. But the wealth that surrounds us is the fruit of the whole of history, the accumulated capital of the human race from the whole of history. We are born into it, it grows while we live, and then we die. To help us appreciate the bigger picture requires careful education and study that broadens our mind.

This is precisely what Bernstein's book does. It takes us outside of the here and now and help us understand the big picture, and he does this by looking at the details of goods traded in lands far away in all times. The book is beautifully written and wonderfully interesting on every page. I can't recommend it enough.

My only complaints are minor ones: Bernstein doesn't seem to have a solid theory of trade that goes beyond neoclassical economic conventions. Had he put one up front, he would have been able to go beyond the very good chronicle here to actually forge a solid theory of the social order itself. It is another example of how Smith's "propensity to truck and barter" has misled.

Instead of seeing trade as a mutually beneficial exchange that extends from the desire to better one's lot in life, and an extension of human rationality, he treats the entire subject as if it were an instinct of some

sort. But that is a regrettable oversight that in no way diminishes the contribution here.

My second complaint concerns the final chapter, which conforms to a rule often cited by the late Murray Rothbard -- that all final chapters of books should just be removed. He spends the entire book showing how trade can take place without any government management, and then uses the last chapter to argue for government-managed trade in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization.

You just want to shout: Read your own book, Mr. Bernstein! In general I would have appreciated a less tentative conclusion, something along the lines of pointing out that trade is what makes it possible for all great and glorious things to take shape in this world, and without which only a few lucky people would be alive, living in caves and eating whatever we could hunt or gather. The book is even more important than the author knows.

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Subtletyproof

Matthew Lickona | Review

10/17/08

"Well, there goes my Catholic hipster cred," I said to The Wife the morning after seeing *Fireproof*, the new film from the Christian filmmaking team behind *Facing the Giants*. "Now I have to go on record saying I didn't hate a film where accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior plays an integral role in the plot. But by golly, the thing was just so sweet and sincere. The sweetness was so relentless, so utterly without guile. How do you hate on that?"

The Wife tried not to smirk at the bit about Catholic hipster cred. Then she offered sympathy: "It's hard to kick the puppy."

Wise woman. But of course, it wasn't just the sweetness that stayed my hate. First and perhaps foremost is the film's human scale. What's at stake? Nothing more than the ordinary seven-year-old marriage of Caleb and Catherine Holt. (Cue Chestertonian quip about how saving an ordinary marriage is actually far more important than stopping the asteroid on a collision course with earth.) There aren't even any kids to worry about damaging. What's the source of conflict? Money and housework, for starters -- though ultimately, it's nothing more than Caleb's selfishness, manifested in his saving for a boat and his addiction to online porn. (The world and the flesh, presented in appropriately mundane fashion; Jacob selling his birthright for a mess of pottage.)

What finally starts the engines of divorce? Nothing more than the husband's loss of temper. (He's good enough that he won't hit his wife, but not good enough that he won't make her cower in the face of his rage.) And who comes to the rescue in our hero's hour of need? Friends and family -- Caleb's father and his buddy Michael, men who have gone through some marital troubles of their own. In all this there is a touching regard for the real.

That's not to say I'm urging folks to rush out and make *Fireproof* more of a hit than it already is (it cost a scant \$500,000 to make, and as of today, it's pulled in more than \$17 million). Watching it was a painful yo-yo experience; I was forever being whipped between admiration and groaning. I liked that the preservation of a marriage was seen as important, but I winced as the film tried to make its case for *why* it was important. "Marriage is for better or for worse," intoned Michael. Well, yes, that's what we say, but *why*? Caleb is an agnostic at the film's outset, so there can be no appeal to the notion of marriage as a sign of the unity of Christ and His church, no notion of the two becoming one flesh. All we got was a warning that if you break apart things that are glued together, you risk damaging one or both. But neither Catherine nor Caleb seemed particularly dismayed at the prospect of divorce, and nothing the film actually *showed* gave the viewer any reason to feel differently. As far as we can tell, Caleb and Catherine are two strangers who happen to share a mortgage and little else.

More importantly, the story is human, but the dialogue isn't. Too much exposition; too many speeches. Again and again, the talk sounds like it's taken from a scenario dreamed up by an author writing a relationship guidebook. Never mind bromides such as, "A woman is like a rose -- if you treat her right, she'll bloom," or "A man's got to be a hero to his wife before he can be one to anybody else." I'm talking about ordinary conversation, such as Caleb's lament to Michael: "It's respect. That's the issue. That's the reason our marriage is failing." Or Dad's counsel to Caleb -- speaking here about his own wife: "Son, if you're looking for a perfect mother, I don't think there's one out there; but she's a good woman." Or Caleb's warning to a doctor making a play for Catherine: "I have no intention of stepping aside and

letting you try to steal my wife's heart. I've made some mistakes, but I still love her. So just know that I am going after her, too." Who talks like this?

The yo-yo yanks again when Dad finally preaches Jesus to his son. Things begin well enough. He's already established a natural way of bringing God into things -- crediting the Lord with doing a work in him, a work that saved his own marriage. Caleb, of course, resists: "Dad, if you're going to tell me I need Jesus, please don't. I don't need a crutch." "He's more than a crutch," replies Dad. "He's become the most significant part of our lives. When I realized who I was, and who He was, I realized I needed Him" At this point, I'm pleasantly surprised. Jesus is being presented as neither a spiritual add-on to life, nor as a guarantee of future happiness, but as a transformative force.

And then we learn the nature of that force: "I needed His forgiveness and salvation." Suddenly, Caleb is hearing about how he's going to go to hell for failing to meet God's standards. I thought we were talking about saving a marriage? It's one thing to suggest that Christ's sacrifice provides a model for human love, or that Christ can transform the heart. It's another to suggest that you cannot understand what love is until you've confessed that you're a sinner and asked God to forgive you.

But even then, the film doesn't entirely release its grip on reality. Once our hero has given his life to Christ, things don't magically get better. In fact, they get worse. The difference is not in the events, but in Caleb's ability to handle them. And while Caleb is being transformed from within, he's still following his father's practical advice for showing love -- acquiring the habit naturally. The yo-yo jerks back to admiration.

Until the ending, anyway. (Or rather, until after the *first* ending -- the only one a film like this really needed.) That's when it becomes clear that this wasn't a film about saving a troubled marriage. It wasn't even a film about saving a troubled marriage with a little help from Jesus. It was a film about getting right with God. And sadly, that *ultimate* ending betrays the human story that's been told so far.

Still, it's hard to kick the puppy.

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