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"Doctrinal Responsibilities": Evenhanded, Open and Fair

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Opinion & ARTS

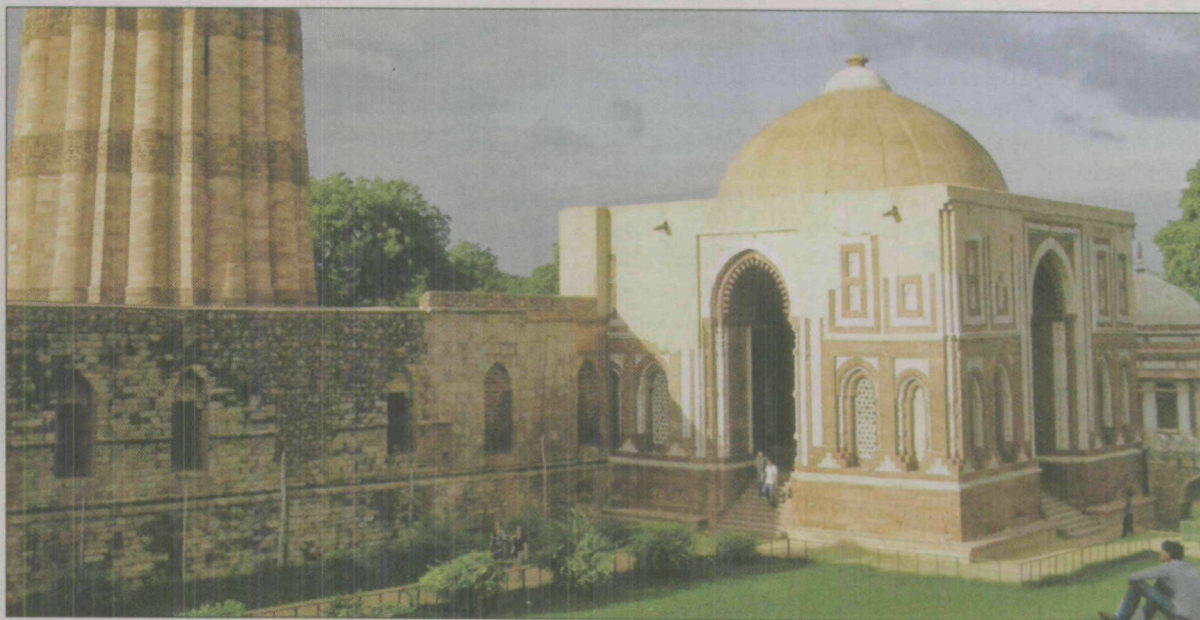
OPINION BOOKS LETTERS ARTS

NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER

OCTOBER 14, 2011 • 17

*Traveling in India provides
perspective and vivid
occasions of grace*

Away and back



Late afternoon at the Qutb Minar Complex in Delhi, India

—Aiden Duffy



—Claire Schaeffer-Duffy
Aiden Duffy and Jesse Schaeffer
Kenworthy hike through a
Himalayan forest.

By CLAIRE SCHAEFFER-DUFFY

I spent most of August traveling through northern India with my youngest son, my brother and his family, the trip made possible by a donation from a generous friend who, like me, is an Indiophile. My father, a cultural affairs officer with the United States Information Agency, was first assigned to India in 1962 and my family lived there for a total of seven years, in the absurdly privileged existence then available to American diplomats. I have returned three times since and remain addicted to the place of my early childhood.

On this most recent trip, my family and I visited the cities of Delhi, Udaipur, Fatehpur Sikri and Agra, and then traveled north for a trek in the holy Himalayas, the youngest and, I think, most beautiful mountains in the world.

Delhi was an assault of color, congestion and hazards that

prompted frequent prayer. *Dear God, please let us make it across the street alive.* India's growing prosperity is evident in the city's well-delineated roads, traffic lights, and zebra crossings, but these efforts at order are meaningless to the extraordinary number of people trying to get from point A to point B in a reasonable amount of time.

In India, if you can endure the rigors of the journey to your destination, chances are you will be well-rewarded. This proved true for us throughout our travels. Death-defying commutes brought us to exquisitely beautiful Mogul mausoleums; a grueling 20-hour bus ride preceded our hikes through Himalayan forests and meadows.

Brushing away flies and aggressive vendors, my son Aiden and I had to pick our way through the trash-laden, crowded alleyways of a Delhi marketplace before entering the enclave that houses the gold-domed tomb of Shaykh Nizam-ud-

Din, the greatest of all Indian Sufis.

Nizam-ud-Din practiced an inclusive faith that emphasized renunciation and reconciliation, writes William Dalrymple in his travelogue, *City of Djinn: A Year in Delhi*:

According to the Shaykh, the first step of Sufism was not related to Friday prayers or empty rituals, but with the mastery of the maxim: "Whatever you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not wish it to happen to others; wish for yourself what you wish for others also."

The Shaykh lived during the early 14th century and was a contemporary of Delhi's warrior ruler Gias ud-Din Tughluk. The sultan reportedly once commanded Nizam-ud-Din's followers to leave their work of building a well for a Sufi monastery and construct a fort. But holiness

Continued on Page 21

'Doctrinal Responsibilities': evenhanded, open and fair

VIEWPOINT

By MICHAEL BUCKLEY

After the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine had delivered its criticism of *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* by St. Joseph Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, theologians and boards of theological societies in the United States contested the content of the criticism and protested the manner of its formulation (NCR, April 15). In particular, the regret was widespread that the committee had ignored the protocols of "Doctrinal Responsibilities," a set of guidelines approved by the U.S. bishops in 1989 on how to handle doctrinal disputes with theologians. This

regret was answered by the president of the Catholic bishops' conference, Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, who contended that it was in its expectations "somewhat inaccurate."

Dolan framed this central judgment clearly, publicly and graciously. It seems only appropriate, then to respond by citing his position and by indicating policies that might stand in need of further consideration.

In a July 7 letter to John E. Thiel, president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Dolan wrote: "The document ['Doctrinal Responsibilities'] does not address the particular role of the USCCB Committee on Doctrine and its specific obligations. As you probably know, this document guides rather the work of individual

diocesan bishops and does not presume to offer guidance to the bishops' Committee on Doctrine. That having been said, we bishops should always be mindful of improving the manner in which we engage theologians in a necessary discussion of their work."

I would offer the following reflections.

Certainly, "Doctrinal Responsibilities" makes no attempt to address the specific role of the Committee on Doctrine as such, but it necessarily touches upon its concerns insofar as it explores the proper functions of and the relationships between theologians and bishops (the magisterium) — both to encourage positive collaboration and to resolve any problematic areas.

The full title of the document, "Doc-

trinal Responsibilities: Approaches to Promoting Cooperation and Resolving Misunderstandings Between Bishops and Theologians," bespoke its set purpose: among the bishops and theologians both the promotion of cooperation and the resolution of any doctrinal disputes between them.

Whereas the preface of the document specified and so limited the kind of issues that might occupy "Doctrinal Responsibilities," it made no parallel specification or selection among theologians and bishops. The parties were articulated in the singular as well as in the plural for the sake of these guidelines, but "Doctrinal Responsibilities" did allow for the fact that "several bishops or several theologians may be

Continued on Page 22

22 OPINION/LETTERS

'DOCTRINAL': MEASURES TO EFFECTIVELY DEAL WITH CONFLICTS

Continued from Page 17

acting as initiating party or second party." "Doctrinal Responsibilities" applies simply to any doctrinal conflicts that might occur between bishops and theologians in general, and their number was not set by protocol. Nowhere was their number limited to an individual bishop or an individual theologian.

The issues that could arise between theologian(s) and bishop(s) could be profitably considered and fairly mediated if the parties in discussion or dispute have agreed to the procedures suggested by "Doctrinal Responsibilities." The document emphatically does not establish another office or structure of authority figures above the bishops. Rather, it suggests veteran devices by which doctrinal issues could be clarified and resolved.

In this way, and only in this way, can "Doctrinal Responsibilities" "guide" (to use Dolan's vocabulary) — that is, offer suggestions or possibilities for the work of individual bishops and theologians, or for the work of the several persons who are acting in a dispute either as initiating or second party. "Doctrinal Responsibilities" suggests a pluralism of possible protocols that

could be adopted analogously by the parties for the resolution of such conflicts.

As is well-known, these protocols came out of some 10 years (1980-89) of careful study, discussion and formulation by American Catholic learned societies — the Catholic Theological Society of America and the Canon Law Society of America, the painstaking work of the U.S. bishops' conference, and weeks of exacting examination and suggestions by the Holy See. They met the careful attention and reception of the Catholic theologians and bishops who comprised or staffed the Committee on Doctrine at that time. The American bishops overwhelmingly approved them for use in the United States in 1989. They were found to be judicious and so widely approved.

To bypass all of this collective experience and its resultant codification appeared to negate the effective presence of procedures that should be operating for the contemporary church as a "rule of reason." St. Thomas Aquinas maintains that the non-consideration or absence of such a rule in the event of choice opens up the likelihood of error as when a carpenter fails to use a ruler and so draws a defective line. "It [a decision] first takes on the nature of

fault from this: that without actually considering the rule, one proceeds to choice — just as the carpenter does no wrong in not always not having at hand a measure, but in proceeding to cut without using this measure . . . in proceeding to choose without employing the rule or measure."

What the bishops of a previous decade provided to the church in the United States through "Doctrinal Responsibilities" was such a graceful rule or measure, one that could significantly diminish or even inhibit misunderstandings, injustice, unwarranted decisions and conflict.

Why were theologians so disappointed that the Committee on Doctrine did not attend to "Doctrinal Responsibilities"? Because a measure such as "Doctrinal Responsibilities" could effectively deal with conflicts between theologians and bishops — which by definition, of course, includes the members of the Committee on Doctrine. Unresolved contradictions can effectively undermine the credibility and efficacy of leadership in the church, and this possibility makes such procedures as "Doctrinal Responsibilities" seem particularly urgent in our day.

The Catholic world can become needlessly divided by ignorance, misrepresentation

and unfairness, by unanswerable rumors and suspicions. It needs to sort these out and adjudicate charges of doctrinal infidelity by the strategies and balance offered by careful and objective procedures. "Doctrinal Responsibilities" provides for such civility — and so increases the possibility of justice and charity for all parties.

To be even more concrete and without attempting to parse the procedures of "Doctrinal Responsibilities": it would seem that if the leaders of the church are calling someone and their work under judgment — especially when a negative judgment could seriously derogate from his or her reputation — that this process be obviously evenhanded, reverent, open and fair. The persons under consideration should be informed that this process is under way and have the opportunity both to explain whatever is at issue and to defend their work before a decision is given.

In this way, "Doctrinal Responsibilities" could become a valuable and welcome resource for our church and its abiding peace — one that we should not forego.

[Jesuit Fr. Michael J. Buckley is professor emeritus of theology in the Department of Religious Studies at Santa Clara University.]

LETTERS

Just deserts?

■ I disagree with your Sept. 16 editorial concerning Bishop Robert Finn, suggesting the church in Kansas City, Mo., deserves better. Finn has apologized several times. He has also done good things for the church here.

A friend calls him a visionary for his recent purchase of a new Catholic Center. He has also taken a stand against the nuclear weapons plant in our city and has been strong against the scourge of pornography.

Despite the rapid advancement of the secular Catholic, the bishop promotes benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. He promotes apologetics instead of ignorance.

THOMAS BRANNON
Liberty, Mo.

■ The situation here in Kansas City is so awful it is hard to describe, but your editorial did a good job of voicing the concerns, doubts and disgust of the faithful of this diocese. I am sickened by the inability of the hierarchy to admit that some priests are criminals at the expense of innocent children.

We will never know the full effect the child sexual abuse and child pornogra-

phy will have on the victims. We will never really comprehend the amount of adult suicides or addictions that happen later in life because of the continued cover-up of sexual predators just because they happen to be priests.

God bless the principal who risked her job by reporting unusual behavior, and the two women at the diocesan office who knew how bad the situation was and urged top officials to call the police.

I wonder how much the 140-page-plus "report" cost. It seems like any one of us could have told them that what they did was terribly wrong — downright criminal — without expectation of being paid. The editorial is quite true in stating, "The leader in this case has broken trust with the community." I do not think of the bishop as a leader.

LIZ DONNELLY
Kansas City, Mo.

Let's laugh

■ Melissa Musick Nussbaum's piece, "We laugh because we know who we are" (NCR, Sept. 30), is so on target and, for this reader, fills a vital need in today's horrific and angst-filled world. Kudos to Ms. Nussbaum for voicing the unspoken with her thoughtful essay:

namely, the need to look the world in the face and dare to laugh. I am reminded of the monk "who laughed at death" and of that much-used phrase, "laugh to keep from crying." Wouldn't it be nice if essays like this could appear with regularity in publications throughout the world, in every language — as a gentle reminder, or as a kind of survival tonic?

AMIE ILVA TATEM
Staten Island, N.Y.

Hidden treasures

■ Thank you so much for running the double page center spread of your Sept. 2 edition with pictures of the Lasallian Volunteers' cross-country bike ride. It is rare for these folks to get any recognition at all, and if there were any justice in the world they would be getting lots of it.

I speak from experience. I have had the privilege of living with the volunteers in community for the last 12 years. Without their labor our small nonprofit would not be able to exist. Since they work for a stipend (a meager one from us), we are able to offer afterschool help to students from some of the toughest neighborhoods in Oakland, and to offer ESL classes and basic computer classes to many recent immigrants.

Without Lasallian Volunteers, we would have to fold.

They have also brought life and laughter to the two old De La Salle Christian brothers who share community with them. They are one of the hidden treasures of the American church and I am glad you have chosen to celebrate them.

(Br.) ROBB WALLACE, FSC
Oakland, Calif.

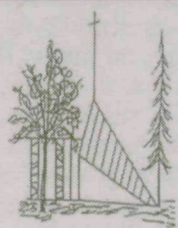
[De La Salle Br. Robb Wallace is the board chair of the Lasallian Educational Opportunities Center in Oakland.]

Rollin' on

■ As we continue to read articles such as "In South Africa, outrage gives way to acceptance of translations" in your Sept. 16 issue, it becomes more and more apparent that the imposition of the new translation of the Roman Missal will take place without any serious attempt to correct its many flaws.

Instead, the new translation is being presented under the guise of a renewal of the liturgy and eucharistic theology. We are being asked to "embrace" and "welcome" this Trojan horse.

In the meantime, millions of dollars will be made by Catholic book publish-



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John O'Brien, theologian and Spiritan priest, works among Pakistan's poor. His many publications include *Theology and the Option for the Poor* (Liturgical Press, 1992) and *The Unconquered People: The Liberation of an Oppressed Caste* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming, 2012).

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