

# Blurred Boundaries

## Theological Schools Respond to a Many-Cultured Society

### Seven Stories That Tell the Tale

*A map may be the only place we can find a world with sharp, clear boundaries between countries. Reality is much less precise as territorial imperatives, increased mobility, and new technologies bring people and cultures together in ways never anticipated at the beginning of the century just past. What are the implications for ministry at home and abroad? How does the interweaving of diverse cultures affect the way in which theological schools prepare their students?*

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One task of theological education is to get students to lift their heads up, look around, and learn that there are world views beyond the ones that formed them. Once, that exercise was largely academic since most students would minister in homogeneous communities much like the ones from which they came. Some students with a taste for the exotic might head to “the mission field” or even “home missions,” but for most the only taste of the other side was the one provided in their theological formation.

No longer is the wider world an academic construct. Theological students pick their

way through a cornucopia of opportunities. Some arise from their own histories. Some cascade into their laps from changing circumstances. Some are cultivated intentionally to relate students both academically and pastorally to the world beyond as it, in turn, moves ever closer. In the pages that follow, In Trust tells the stories of a variety of schools and their various interactions with a rapidly shrinking world.

Sometimes the world shrinks within our very families. That’s the case for columnist and church historian Martin Marty, whose story of the global community come home sets the tone for our collection.

### A New Generation

By Martin E. Marty

The Marty male line since 1792 goes like this: Rudolph begat Bendicht begat Gottfried begat Emil begat Martin begat Joel begat Noah begat Muhammed. E-mail from Joel in Minnesota: “A Baby Boy! Muhammed Noah Marty! I’m so excited that I don’t even know if I have the spelling or weight facts completely straight, but here goes: After a very long day of labor, . . . they finally had to do a C-section. The baby was 7 lbs. 11 oz., 21 inches. Born in the first hour of November 21st, healthy and happy. Mom is doing fine. . . . They are in the very room where Noah, his father, was born 21 years ago (less seven days); how the years fly by. I recall proudly calling so many of you that night like it was yesterday. I am so proud of Noah—who is bursting with pride, evidencing maturity and responsibility—that I too could burst, so I write to you all to share the good news. With love, Joel and Susie.” The Swiss/German and biblical naming finds prophetic complement, and Harriet and Marty become great-grandparents.

There must be a story. Of course, there is. Minneapolis has the nation’s largest Somalian

community—part of the new-immigrant American mix that is transforming all our spaces and corners—and Noah married Sagal, from that community.

Forty years ago the marriage of a Protestant and a Catholic meant an epochal jolt for two families. Thirty years ago Jewish-Christian marriages caused upheaval. Both now are commonplace. Twenty years ago the influx of Asians and their presence in collegiate life led to many East-West marriages. Ten years ago we looked around and found that more marriages than not seem to involve gnostics and agnostics, indifferent and somewhat-different, nonobservant and semi-observant. Now, as the Muslim population surges, there are thousands of “my daughter-in-law is Muslim” stories, and they are soon to be taken for granted.

So we Martys join the adjusters, accommodators, and welcomers. After all those years of talking about the “pluralist society” and about the wonders of meeting “the other”; of studying interreligious conflict and participating in interfaith dialogue; of chairing conferences on migration and refugees; of being committed to work on the religious dimensions of a “globalization ethic,” the realities have come close to home.

## Embracing New Cultures

By Carole Anne Nelson

In 1973 when St. Herman's Orthodox Seminary was established in Kodiak, Alaska, its mission was simple: to train Native Alaskans to serve their own congregations as readers, deacons, or priests. Seminarians came from isolated villages in rural Alaska and had little, if any, exposure to the outside world. For many it was the first time they had left their village, and St. Herman's was a safe place from which to view a wider world.

Today's rural Alaska is very different. Villages may still lack flush toilets, but the world has arrived with a vengeance via satellite dishes and Internet hook-ups. The seminary's job is no longer so simple. St. Herman's must prepare prospective clergy to deal with the effects of globalization on Alaska's Orthodox Christians. (History buffs will recall that Alaska belonged to Russia until 1867 when Andrew Johnson's administration bought it. Eastern Orthodoxy is still widespread, especially among Aleuts, Yup'iks, and Tlingits.)

This generation of Native Alaskans is torn by sharply conflicting lifestyles: the traditional, essentially sacred subsistence on the land,

Theology rears its head as well. When I am asked questions about "God and all the other people . . ." I tend to say, "I don't know." Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger is sure: everyone but his people have "gravely deficient" faiths. I would use other language, never having been able to settle into a simple, relaxed universalism, being a sort of evangelizer at heart who rejoices in the open embrace of Christ among all the peoples. These options are at war in the mind while the heart more simply reaches out.

The Lutheran in me for years has taken refuge in some lines of Luther, who, having spoken of how God conceals God's self "in" revelation, suggested that there are things we do not know about God that are hidden "behind" revelation. So I picture the expansive love of God reaching beyond the circle of explicit Christians, even "anonymous" Christians, but I am not going to write a dogmatic dogmatics text on the theme.

For now I'll keep the systematic theology questions in the back of my mind and do what thousands, millions, of families do: embrace the changes, embrace the new. When I first held and rocked my first great-grandson one November eve, I had only one thing in the front of my mind and heart: this is a beloved great-grandchild? Great!



Photograph by Carole Anne Nelson

and the material abundance of modern society. Drug and alcohol abuse are endemic. The suicide rate is up. In this context, said St. Herman's rector, the Right Reverend Innocent, bishop of Anchorage, the Orthodox Church must convey the message that Jesus has a meaning for their everyday lives. In other words, the church offers not just a place for the rituals and traditions of their elders, but a living faith that they can take with them into this new world.

To further this message, St. Herman's is developing a missionary perspective for its students that harks back to its namesake, who arrived from Russia in 1794 to take the gospel to the aboriginal villages and founded the first Orthodox church in the Americas—Kodiak's Holy Resurrection Church, which today's seminarians help staff.

The unique nature of this preparation and the holy place where it takes place now draws committed students from outside the Alaskan community. Sergius Nauman and Bryan Bodine, both in their first year, come from Pennsylvania via New York and Wisconsin respectively. Subdeacon David Ogan, in his second year, grew up on a Blackfoot reservation in Montana and came to St. Herman's from Nashville after he left the army. Yup'ik Joseph Zackar, who returned to the seminary after serving his village as a reader for eighteen years, is the only Native Alaskan enrolled this year.

The regular faculty consists of the Reverend John Dunlop, the academic dean; his wife, Matushka Bea, who has nearly completed her doctorate; Hieromonk Ioasaph, who also serves the scattered parishes on Kodiak; and

*The Reverend John Dunlop, St. Herman's academic dean, is flanked by seminarians (left to right) Joseph Zackar, David Ogan, Sergius Nauman, and Bryan Bodine as they pray before the relics of St. Herman at the Church of the Holy Resurrection in Kodiak, Alaska.*

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## Encouraging Hispanic Scholars

By Linda-Marie Delloff

**R**ecent census statistics indicate that Hispanics have become the largest minority in the nation. Yet in 1999 the number of Hispanic teachers at seminaries that are members of the Association of Theological Schools was only eighty-six, 2.7 percent of the schools' total faculty. The number is an improvement over the forty-six Hispanic teachers recorded in 1991, but is still far below the number needed to educate new teachers and community leaders. Working hard to overcome that gap is the Hispanic Theological Initiative. Launched in 1997 at Emory University in Atlanta, the program is now located at Princeton Theological Seminary. Its director is Zaida Maldonado Pérez.

The program, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, aims to increase the presence of Hispanic faculty in theological schools in the U.S. (including Puerto Rico). To that end, it offers a

variety of aid and support programs for Latinos and Latinas pursuing theological studies. Since its inception, HTI has awarded 159 scholarships to those pursuing master's degrees or Ph.D.s, as well as those engaged in postdoctoral studies. In addition to its scholarship program, HTI publishes a newsletter and journal, offers a variety of intensive summer workshops, and stages regional gatherings at which students meet for scholarly exchange and mutual support.

HTI has no particular theological orientation and serves students from a variety of nations and backgrounds. The schools they attend range from the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico to Concordia Seminary in Missouri to the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Illinois to the divinity schools of Harvard and Yale.

A condition of an HTI financial award is that the student's school match the amount as closely as possible. According to Maldonado Pérez, more than thirty schools have participated in the program, some hosting several students at a time.

One of the initiative's most noteworthy features is its mentoring program. HTI invites Hispanic religion scholars around the country to spend time as individual mentors for an awardee. The arrangement is not meant to replace advisors or professors at the student's own school; rather it is an effort to supplement the gifts of educators on the scene to enhance further a student's growth. The initiative pays travel for mentor and student to meet and encourages regular contact.



*The Hispanic Theological Initiative is striving to develop a national community of Latino and Latina scholars who will serve their communities and teach the next generation of Hispanic seminarians.*



## Understanding Islam

By Linda-Marie Delloff

**I**slam is much in the news. It is the fastest growing religion in the U.S. As increasing numbers of immigrants arrive, they bring with them both their faith and the diverse cultures that have nurtured it. Around the world, Muslims are involved in some of the most difficult—and least understood—conflicts embroiling various nations. There is clearly a great need to develop avenues for conversation and mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims.

Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, the largest Catholic graduate school of theology and ministry in North America, has taken a major step toward facilitating that understanding. In October 2000, it introduced a new Catholic-Muslim Studies Program, which is housed in CTU's Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry. The Bernardin Center also has a long-standing

Catholic-Jewish Studies Program.

Following a 1999 trip to the Holy Land led by CTU's president, the Reverend Donald Senior, C.P., Chicago philanthropists and committed Catholics James and Catherine Denny decided they wanted to help establish a center to promote Christian-Muslim relations. The program's new director and professor of Islamic studies, Scott Alexander, cites several program goals. In addition to educating church leaders and teachers about Islam, the program aims "to be a public advocate for peace and social justice by reducing the sense of alienation between Muslim and Christian cultures. Of particular importance in this regard is enabling both Christians and Muslims to abandon stereotypes."

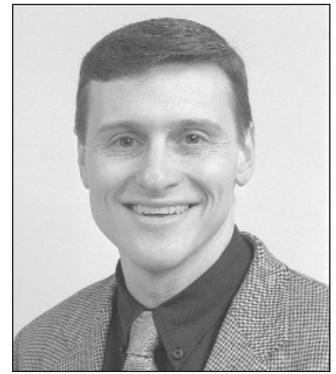
The program is especially appropriate at CTU, says Alexander, because international students comprise 30 percent of the student body. Also, CTU graduates serve in sixty-four

countries around the world, many with large Muslim populations. Chicago itself has a number of Islamic institutions whose leaders will be dialogue partners and advisors.

The center offers both credit and non-credit courses and events. Currently Alexander teaches two credit courses: Introduction to Islam and Islamic Mysticism. More courses will be added each quarter. The program's first annual conference takes place this spring, with scholars and religious leaders from around the United States discussing "Directions for Mus-

lim-Christian Dialogue in the Twenty-first/Fifteenth [in the Muslim calendar] Century."

The program supports other parts of CTU's broad international focus. For example, it helps prepare the school's Israel Study Group, which is resident in predominantly Muslim East Jerusalem for two months each fall. It also helps students prepare for an Overseas Training Program year; some of the students currently enrolled in classes are preparing for a year of field placement in Pakistan.



Scott Alexander heads the Catholic-Muslim Studies Program.

## Old Country, New Priests

By Melinda R. Heppe

**S**S. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan, founded in 1885 to prepare Polish-American men for the Roman Catholic priesthood, once seemed a school whose day had passed. Now, however, it's poised on the brink of its second rebirth in twenty years.

By the early 1980s, the traditional stream of ordinands was drying up. The arrival of lay students lifted morale and helped pay the bills, but by 1982 there were fewer than twenty prospective priests on campus. "That was down from fifty-five or so when I came as a student in 1974," said Monsignor Francis Koper, the rector.

But in the years leading to the school's centennial, changes were afoot in Poland. With the fall of the communist regime, lots of young men were riding the crest of the church's popularity into the seminary. Koper attended a meeting of Polish seminary rectors and floated the idea that some of those men might be interested in a different sort of challenge—ministry in the United States. And so, on the school's 100th birthday, it opened a recruitment office in Poland. A steady stream of students began to arrive. More than 100 of them (about 65 percent of those who have come) have completed their studies and stayed in the U.S., where they serve in eighteen dioceses.

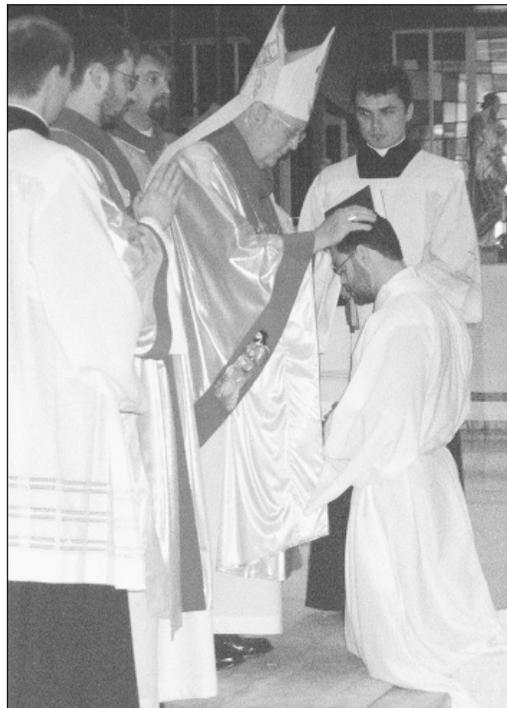
Koper said the school has gotten very good at teaching language and at helping students adapt to American church life. "They are always most surprised at the involvement of the laity," he said. "They come from a traditional church, with an involved folk culture."

Koper has some insight into that culture: he tells a story about his cousin in Poland whose priest asked him to serve as a eucharistic minister, to help distribute holy communion. "He's gotten resistance from his friends, though. They say, 'How can you do that when you drink with us on Saturday night?'" SS. Cyril & Methodius exposes its students to American

church life, and then gives them time to process what they have experienced.

Once again, though, changes in Poland are affecting the school in Michigan. "The tide has changed. The church is no longer the hero. There's a new wave of anti-clericalism," said Koper. And so the supply of students is slowly drying up. This year the school has fifty-five lay students and twenty-nine seminarians (all but one of whom is from Poland).

What next? Things are in the planning stage, but Koper is hoping to continue to do what the school does best—introducing students to American language and church life—but broaden the source of students far beyond Poland. It seems a workable goal, since almost one in four priests ordained in the U.S. in recent years comes from another country. And so an old bicultural school may become multicultural at last. •IT•



Bishop John Nevins of Venice, Florida, ordained Jacek Mazur to the transitional diaconate for service to the people of God in his diocese on December 8, 2000.