

# COLUMNISTS

## Finding God in the midst of others

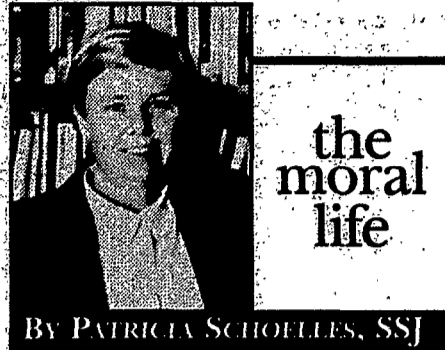
I plan to spend the next few columns reflecting on what moral implications might be associated with various "parts" of the Mass. To select parts of this ritual and try to understand how each one represents and indicates aspects of the moral life might, I think, be a fruitful exercise.

We might as well begin at the beginning. The first thing we do as we celebrate Eucharist can sometimes be overlooked. I once asked one of my classes "What is the first thing we do to celebrate Eucharist?" I received various answers and rejected all in favor of: "We gather."

In my view, the first thing we do is come together. We leave home, abandon our private worlds for a while, move beyond our own personal devotions and pieties, occupations and concerns, and join with the other members of our eucharistic community. This is the basis and foundation for the rest of what we do as we celebrate the paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of Christ.

This action shows that for us, the worship of God is a communal venture. We do it as a people, a community, and not simply as a collection of individuals. We recognize that for us, worship happens as we join with one another.

The whole notion of community being the foundation for right worship can be an odd one at times for those whose primary religious formation stressed a more priva-



BY PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

tized version of faith. For some of us, our catechism lessons focused on the Mass primarily as the source of sanctifying grace, an encounter with God wherein sanctifying grace would be directly "infused" into our souls. In the theological framework undergirding this kind of teaching, the communal nature of our worship was practically overlooked in favor of a personal, interior, and very individualistic understanding of grace.

Since the days when that kind of teaching was emphasized, official church teaching on the Eucharist has shifted in its emphasis. Following upon Scripture studies, the retrieval of aspects of earlier theologies of liturgy and the Eucharist, and through theological reflection on our fundamental beliefs about Christ and the church, we now come to recognize that the encounter with God in Eucharist is based firmly in our understanding of the

nature of Christian community.

Today we emphasize much more the ways in which God is present to us through the community. We are much stronger in accentuating the way we respond to God through our service to the community. We are much more conscious of the social nature of God's action through grace and our responsibilities to one another and to the world around us.

Part of the theological foundation for this renewed emphasis on community is our whole understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation. That "the Word became flesh and dwells among us" really does mean that God dwells in the aspects of human life. We don't escape from human life to encounter God; rather, we immerse ourselves more and more into it in order to encounter God. We don't flee from other people, from the struggle and joy they bring us in order to find God; instead, we learn to find God in the midst of all that. That is the genuine foundation of the Christian faith, and that is the basis for the thanksgiving we offer in Eucharist.

There are many obvious connections between appreciating our gathering together as our first act of worship at Eucharist and the moral life. For one thing, we recognize a tension between genuine Christianity and much of the individualism that dominates American life. While we all have responsibilities to foster gen-

uine selfhood, the isolated, unattached, separated self detached from commitment to the common good will never be an easy fit for Catholics living in this culture. We always look for ways to belong to one another and to foster the growth of societies based upon the social unit of the family and the productive give-and-take that fosters true community. This means we'll always be a bit "at odds" with American life.

It also means that for us we will always begin our moral reflection from a perspective that takes seriously and strives to protect human relationships. Whatever principles we value concerning human sexuality, Catholic social ethics, business ethics, medical and biological ethics, all these must be seen first and foremost to nurture genuine human relationships, whatever these may be. This includes spousal and family relationships, interaction between men and women, among work colleagues, between social and economic classes, races and nationalities, even our relationships with the environment and the entire cosmos. The foundation for Catholic moral teaching begins exactly where our eucharistic liturgies begin: bringing people together in genuine human relating, the foundation of our life itself and the praise and thanks we offer.

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Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

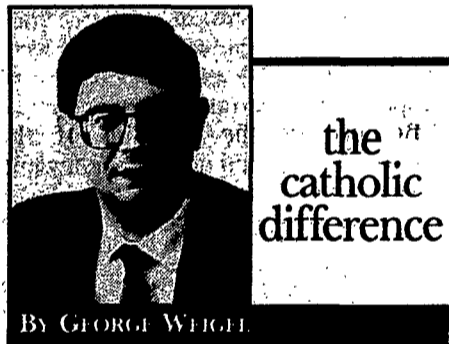
## The moral challenge of genetic mapping

The most enjoyable commencement address I ever heard was at my brother's graduation from Northwestern University in 1975. It was delivered by Newton Minow, a Northwestern alum best remembered for describing television as a "vast wasteland" while serving as President Kennedy's FCC chairman. Minow was endlessly funny (but I can't remember a single thing he said — no observation, no challenge, no call to arms.

So when I was asked to deliver the commencement address at the University of Dallas this past May, I wanted to give the graduates (including my older daughter, Gwyneth) something to think about. Here's part of what I said:

"...Future historians will remember the decryption of DNA and the mapping of the human genome as the decisive human fact of these times. The completion of the Human Genome Project holds out the prospect of extending lives by early-detection techniques and precisely-designed vaccines, and ultimately correcting the genetic defects that lead to sickle-cell anemia, Huntington's disease, and various cancers. These are welcome prospects.

"But the new genetically-based tech-



BY GEORGE WEIGEL

nologies will also give us the means to re-manufacture the human condition by re-manufacturing human beings. And in this power lies a world of temptation. If we do not, as a civilization, resist those temptations, the world will suffer the kind of dehumanization once imagined only by novelists. Today, though, it is no longer a question of whether we are in Aldous Huxley's 'brave new world.' When the British government establishes a 'Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority' (so reminiscent of Huxley's 'Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre'), we are ... living in the 'brave new world' already.

"...What are we to say to those who promise an unlimited future for human-

ity if only we permit them to conduct experiments with the most vulnerable members of the human community today? How are we to guide the development of the new genetic knowledge and the new biotechnologies so that they contribute to genuine human flourishing rather than create a world of stunted humanity — a world of souls without longing, without passion, without striving, without suffering, without surprises or desire ... a world without love?

"Responding wisely to that [challenge] will be, for you, what meeting the challenge of the Second World War was for your grandparents and what responding to the (Soviet) threat was for your parents. Indeed, the challenge [may] be greater, for unlike your grandparents and parents, you will not be asked to meet the threat of what is indisputably evil; you will be challenged to use this new knowledge, these new goods, so that they do not produce evils...

"The response to a scientific hubris that regards our genotype as the essence of our selves and that plans nothing less than the eugenic manufacture of virtually immortal human beings must be Christian humanism — a humanism root-

ed in the biblical image of human beings as made in the image and likeness of God; a humanism formed in the model of Christ the redeemer, the model of true humanity; a humanism in which knowledge is disciplined by the moral truths that were inscribed in human beings by our Creator.

"Over against an atheistic humanism in which human beings are the creators and arbiters of life, standing in eugenic judgment on others' worthiness to live or die and promising salvation through genetic engineering, we must posit the humanism of biblical religion, in which God is the creator of life and in which life is always a miracle, never a habit. In the face of the temptations of the brave new world, in which our humanity is reduced to a ... mixture of proteins and the soul is thought a matter of chemistry, we must defend the grandeur and nobility of our imperfect but redeemable human condition, with its God-given capacities for sacrifice, effort, courage, and love."

Tough? Yes. What's ahead? I think so.

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