

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2011

THEATER REVIEW

An earnest look at black gay men

E. Patrick Johnson portrays a bunch of colorful personalities in "Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South." **C2**



THE TV COLUMN

Millions check Charlie Sheen's 'demise'
Top ratings for Sheen-less "Two and a Half Men." **C9**

BACKSTAGE

The one-year theater

Their company will disband after 365 days. **C10**

“There’s a lot of cool hardware to drool over in the latest crop of speculative novels.”

Book World, **C4**



 **LIVE TODAY @ washingtonpost.com/conversations** Reliable Source columnists Amy Argetsinger and Roxanne Roberts discuss your favorite gossip **Noon**

Writing about the Catholic Church’s darkest scandals, he still sees the light



MATT MCCLAIN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

‘I WON’T GIVE UP ON THE CHURCH’: Author Jason Berry pauses in the Jesuit Cemetery at Georgetown University on Sept. 12. His new book focuses on the Catholic Church’s finances.

He still prays. Still finds solace in the liturgy, still finds peace in the rites of the Catholic Mass. It’s possible to love something even if you’ve spent much of your life exposing its darkest secrets, its deepest shames. It’s possible if you have faith. But faith doesn’t just permanently arrange itself to thrive in the human heart and mind — it has to be tended. And so it is that many a Sunday, Jason Berry kneels to pray in the pews at Mater Dolorosa, the sturdy Catholic church planted heavily among the spiraling oaks, hard by the streetcar tracks, in the Carrollton neighborhood of New Orleans.

Mater Dolorosa. Sorrowful Mother. It seems fitting that Berry, a prolific freelance

Faith above all

BY MANUEL ROIG-FRANZIA

author and journalist, would attend Mass at a church that takes its name from a mother’s sorrows, for he’s trudged and grinded and blasted through the sorrows and pain of his church for more than a quarter-century now. Since encountering the sins of a Catholic priest in Louisiana Cajun country in the mid-1980s, Berry says, he’s interviewed more than 60 victims of sexually abusive priests; he’s spoken casually to and received letters and phone calls from dozens more.

As he burrowed deeper and deeper, he sought guidance from a therapist to cope with “periods of intense rage.” But it took understanding priests and nuns to quietly help him find a way to reconcile his spiritual life with a

BERRY CONTINUED ON C3

THEATER REVIEW

Stellar way to keep race ‘In Mind’

Black actors’ rights are center stage in well-acted production at Arena

BY PETER MARKS

“White folks can’t stand unhappy Negroes, so laugh,” the veteran black actress instructs the young black actor in “Trouble in Mind,” Alice Childress’s wise and extraordinarily winning comedy-drama about American racial strife as it plays out in a New York rehearsal room, circa 1957.

The counsel of Wiletta Mayer, portrayed in Arena Stage’s wondrously effective production by E. Faye Butler, falls disconcertingly on the ears of Brandon J. Dirden’s John Nevins, who’s been cast along with Wiletta in what sounds like a ghastly Southern play, “Chaos in Belleville.” But while John disdains the idea of pasting on a grin of supplication for the show’s white director, he’s not above accepting a part in a Broadway play that treats black characters in the most patronizing way. It is, after all, a job. Even if the tensions of “Trouble in



MARVIN JOSEPH/THE WASHINGTON POST

SUPERB CAST: Actors Starla Benford, left, Brandon J. Dirden and E. Faye Butler have meetings of the minds with their characters in “Trouble in Mind.”

Mind” underline ironies we’re all familiar with — Childress wrote the play 56 years ago — there’s an abiding pleasure in a handling this wry, character-rich and well-acted. Director Irene Lewis first staged this production, with some of the same actors, four years ago when she was running Baltimore’s CenterStage. You

readily see why she’d want to remount it, especially at Arena, where the work’s classic texture meshes superbly with the company’s expressed mission of shedding light on important American plays. “Trouble in Mind,” which once upon a

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The Reliable Source Where are the celebs? At Clinton’s conclave.

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RAMIN TALAEI/BLOOMBERG NEWS

Despite uncovering scandal, he hasn't strayed

BERRY FROM C1

professional vocation that made him a target of scorn among many in the Catholic Church and its defenders. He's been called a "yellow journalist" and a "sensationalist," a spreader of "malicious gossip," yet he keeps writing, and he keeps praying.

"I had to cut a distance between my own idea of faith and the pronouncements of the institution," Berry says over lunch one afternoon before a speech at Georgetown University, his alma mater. "I began to redefine my identity as a Catholic as one much closer to the parish, to the Mass, to the liturgy."

Berry's tenacity has produced an array of work on clerical sexual abuse and questionable church financing — dozens of newspaper and magazine articles and three books, including the recently published "Render Unto Rome: The Secret Life of Money in the Catholic Church." As Berry has traveled the country for book readings this month, the church has been pressed to relive its anguish anew; barely a week ago, victims of clergy sex abuse asked the International Criminal Court at the Hague to prosecute Pope Benedict XVI for crimes against

ing to properly disclose their finances to the same parishioners responsible for making the donations that keep the church afloat. Jean-Francois Lantheaume, charge d'affaires at the apostolic nunciature in Washington, did not respond to requests by phone and e-mail for comment.

In an era when people on Main Street became suckers in the con games of the financial industry, Berry argues that the faithful have been snookered by Rome. Only, in his telling, it's the collection plate — rather than the subprime loan with the balloon payment — that is the vehicle for the powerful's deception of the powerless.

Not overwhelmed

"Look. A good sign!" says John Tutino, a history professor at Georgetown University, harnessing Berry's attention. "A man in a collar heading the way we're heading."

Indeed, up ahead, a Catholic priest pauses to read a sign announcing Berry's appearance at Georgetown for a discussion of his book and the state of the Catholic Church. Berry's mouth curls into an amused crescent. He is a tall man, vigorous at 62, and he smiles easily. But his eyes,

on sexual abuse relieves some of the tension. (Berry asserts in his book that the financial misdeeds he accuses leading church figures of committing are frequently tied to schemes intended to silence abuse victims or pay legal settlements.)

He reminds the small audience about the tradition of parish priests skimming a bit from the Sunday collection plate: "A little walking-around money for Father," he says.

Chuckles all around.

Then, in the audience, the Rev. Raymond Kemp, of the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown, says that a friend warned him not to read "Render Unto Rome" while on vacation, a warning he failed to heed. Kemp says he's worried about his pension. "Thank you for ruining my vacation," he says.

Chuckles all around.

Persistence and penitence

For Berry, it began in the mid-1980s in south-central Louisiana. He was already an established freelance writer, an author of two works of nonfiction and numerous magazine pieces, but he couldn't get anyone interested in publishing a deep examination of the case of Gilbert Gauthé, a Catholic priest accused of molesting boys in the towns of New Iberia, Henry, Broussard and Abbeville.

In 1985, a small weekly, the Times of Acadiana, took a chance, publishing two chilling and deeply reported pieces by Berry. Gauthé, Berry wrote, was a charismatic priest who would lead flocks of children hunting in the marshes, then abuse altar boys in the confessional and the sacristy, the room used to store vestments and sacred vessels employed during Mass. Another local newspaper, the Lafayette Advertiser, responded with a front-page editorial deriding "the vultures of yellow journalism." Gauthé eventually pleaded guilty to molestation charges in one of the first high-profile prosecutions of a Catholic priest in the country.

There have been times over the years when Berry could barely bring himself to enter a church. But he always went back, returning to the places and rituals that his mother and grandmother loved. He sometimes felt "a chill" from fellow parishioners, but they almost never confronted him. "You know New Orleans," he says. "If there's a dead body in the living room, they'll say, 'What a beautiful garden you have.'"

Berry's sleuthing drew national attention, but he struggled to find a publisher for a book he was writing about pedophile priests and the bishops who protected them. Thirty turned him down before his manuscript, which became the book "Lead Us Not Into Temptation: Catholic Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Children," was accepted by Doubleday in August 1991.

Three months after he got the



MATT MCCLAIN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

KEEPING THE FAITH: Jason Berry visited Georgetown University this month to discuss his book and the state of the Catholic Church. He says the church needs more transparency and accountability.

contract he wanted so badly, his wife gave birth to a daughter, Ariel, with Down syndrome. "In a state that can only be called raw fury, bellowing profanities, cursing God as I fell to my knees, screaming Why? Why? Why? pounding the rug with my fist, sobbing and screaming, until a blinding force hit like a thunderbolt, forcing me back against the bed," he wrote in the Chicago Tribune. "I realized that Ariel was life, given by God, and at that moment, wallowing in shame,

flooded with thoughts of the baby and the sorrow surrounding her arrival, I begged God's forgiveness."

In those years after Ariel's birth, Berry often found himself in local churches, praying for her health, even as his work life was consumed with investigating the Catholic Church. That she survived for 17 years only seemed to confirm his faith. "When a prayer is answered," he says at lunch in Georgetown, "it is kind of hard to storm out of the cathedral."

In 1992, when his book was published to some acclaim, he expected interviewers to ask how he could remain a Catholic. He prepared an answer: "Well, we didn't give up on democracy because of Watergate, and I won't give up on the church because of corrupt bishops." But no one asked. One thing he does get asked a lot is whether he is an abuse victim. He's not, he says.

Another book — "Vows of Silence," written with Gerald Renner — followed in 2004. It tracks the allegations of priests and seminarians who say they were sexually abused by the Rev. Marcial Maciel Degollado, the charismatic Mexican-born founder of the Legionaries of Christ and a close friend of Pope John Paul II.

A prominent Catholic cleric, the late Richard John Neuhaus, wrote in 2002 in the journal First Things that an unnamed cardinal told him the charges were "pure invention, without the slightest foundation." Berry's "business is Catholic scandal and sensationalism," Neuhaus wrote. The same year, Mary Ann Glendon, a law professor at Harvard and a former ambassador to the Vatican under President George W. Bush, defended Maciel and decried journalists who were "dredging up old slanders." William Donohue, head of the Catholic League, also criticized Berry. Donohue and Glendon did not respond to interview requests.

Eventually, the journalist was vindicated. In March 2010, the Legionaries acknowledged in a statement that Maciel, who died in 2008, had molested seminarians and fathered several children.

Mindful of the Catholic premise of forgiveness for sins, I ask Berry whether he thinks Maciel is in heaven or hell. He hesitates. "I don't know," Berry says. "Who am I to make a judgment?" He pauses again and considers the question. "If I had to make a bet," he says, "I'd say Maciel is not swimming in the celestial clouds."

Maciel figures prominently in Berry's latest book. The author asserts that Maciel gave a high-ranking church official \$15,000 in gifts to pressure then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict) to halt a canon law investigation of Maciel.

The church is plagued, Berry writes, by "structural mendacity, institutionalized lying." The finances of most parishes go un-audited and undisclosed, he writes. "Catholics," he writes, "historically function in a culture of passivity, a mentality of pray, pay, obey that assumes that donations and decisions entrusted to ecclesial officials are executed for 'the good of the church.'"

I ask him whether he still drops money in the collection basket.

"Every Sunday," he responds without hesitation. It's usually \$3, maybe \$5. He trusts his priest, whom he considers a friend, to make good use of it.

He has faith.

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"I had to cut a distance between my own idea of faith and the pronouncements of the institution."

Jason Berry, author

humanity for allegedly shielding abusive priests. The Vatican's U.S. attorney called the request a "ludicrous publicity stunt."

Countless enterprising journalists have probed the church abuse scandals — including a Pulitzer Prize-winning team at the Boston Globe — but few American writers have been more closely identified with the scandals or have been delving into them longer than Berry. His faith also can give him a kind of credibility with some.

"He's a devout Catholic, so he's family, so to speak," says Peter Borre, an organizer of vigils aimed at preventing the closure of Catholic parishes in Boston and other cities.

In his latest book, Berry chisels an image of his church that reads like an ecclesiastical version of recent Wall Street scandals. He accuses the Vatican of siphoning charitable donations from its special "Peter's Pence" collection to plug its budget deficit and a high-ranking cardinal of collecting bribes in return for access to Pope John Paul II. He puts forth that another high-ranking cardinal facilitated a profiteering scheme to make his nephew rich by selling American churches, and he asserts that dioceses throughout the United States have been shuttering financially successful churches to seize control of their assets and then refuse

heavily lidded and cupped by puffy pouches, look better suited for other emotions.

Speaking at Georgetown, he lays out his vision of the modern church: It is monarchical, he says, with "a constellation of medieval fiefdoms" in each of the dioceses. His arguments sound a bit like those that have been batted about in Washington after the 2008 financial meltdown: more transparency, more accountability, less power in the hands of the few (in this case, bishops) and more input from the many (laypeople and parishioners). Berry worries about the financial health of the church in part because he admires the good works it is capable of, particularly the vast reach of Catholic Charities. "The church is in meltdown," he says.

But, for all his work in the darker recesses of human behavior, Berry insists he can still see the beauty in life, grasp its wonders and joys. In therapy, his goal was "to make sure the material did not engulf me or overpower me." So he writes about jazz — "the cultural stuff is quite a celebration," he says — and has produced a novel, "Last of the Red Hot Poppas." "It's a comedy," he points out.

And, sure enough, even though the topic is far from slapstick, Berry manages to elicit laughter in the lecture hall at Georgetown. Focusing more on money and less

It's rude and antisocial, but he won't stop



Hi, Carolyn:

I was out to dinner with my mom a few nights ago, and we were seated at a table next to a middle-age couple. I was facing the husband and noticed immediately after sitting down that he was staring at me. I thought perhaps I knew him so I glanced over and realized he was staring directly at my chest! I am busty, but I wasn't wearing a low-cut shirt.

This man continued to blatantly stare at my chest and look me up and down for the next 20 minutes, until he left. I even made eye contact with him at one point and gave him a disgusted look and that did nothing!

His wife was completely oblivious, her full attention on her BlackBerry. No matter how much I shifted my body, pulled my tank top up even higher, and attempted to give this man a hint to leave me alone, nothing worked. I was so embarrassed and uncomfortable. My mom noticed it but told me to just ignore it and relax.

It is not fair that I should have to have a nice dinner ruined. I really wanted to say something to the man, but I wasn't sure what would be appropriate or get my point across in the right way. Any advice on how to handle another



NICK GALLIARAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

situation like this? It has happened enough that I am very frustrated and feel completely helpless when it does.

Next time, switch seats with your mom — or ask the host for a new table. You'll shut the gawker down without so much as a flutter in your blood pressure. Why wrestle with the questions of appropriateness or of getting your point across when simply turning your back has both symbolic and practical worth?

I'll answer my own rhetorical question: because paralysis is, unfortunately, a common reaction when people are faced

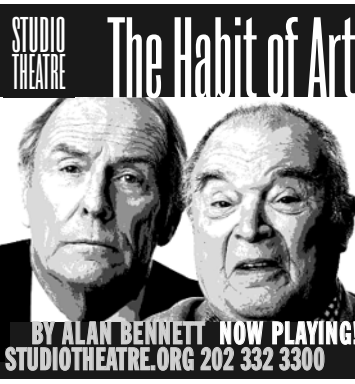
with antisocial behavior. We're so used to having everyone conform (more or less) to an unspoken code of courtesy that when we

come across someone who openly flouts that code, many of us freeze like startled woodland creatures — frustrating ourselves and validating a gawker's impunity.

That such a simple solution as turning our backs or switching seats escapes many of us is both a testament to how unnerving these situations can be, and a hint at the solution.

Since you're among those who get too unnerved to think straight, it won't come naturally for you to walk over, take his picture and say, "Look for it on patheticpervs.com." Instead, accept that you have stage fright and take a cue from pilots, Olympic gymnasts and other high-stress performers: Learn to perform under duress through preparation.

Ask yourself, now, what you can realistically hope to do in these situations, then prepare the words, gestures and/or actions. Say your plans out loud in the shower (seriously); repeat them to your friends by telling



them the restaurant story and spelling out what you wish you had done. Even when practicing feels stupid, use repetition to teach your brain where the path is. In time, you'll be able to find it no matter how rattled you get.

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