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### From the Editor's Desk

#### Living large in the faith

Some months ago, you'll recall, the atmosphere was heavy with the clunky language of postmodern politics, "values" were being reduced to a tick list of far-right political correctness, and the language of Christianity, hijacked for use in the public square, was being invoked in the name of all manner of partisan and national ambitions.

It was, I found, an unnerving time, and it was in that period that I decided to pursue once again an idea that had been floated and discussed in these quarters for some time. The idea was to try to rescue, at least in a small way, the language, symbols and power of Christianity and the practice of faith from the ever-shrinking enclosures that the culture was building up around those realities. The proposal was to do it through the lived experience of people whose lives and work are informed by faith.

To that end, I asked Renée LaReau, whose work is familiar to our readers, to find "robust Catholic Christians," people who threw their arms around the tumult of everyday life and the challenges the culture threw their way. I asked her to find Catholics who issue their own blessings in a big way, who live large in the faith, who embrace the world and who do what they can to meet it on its own terms and redeem it.

Renée took that rather strange assignment and went to work. She has the eye and ear of an elegant writer, the savvy of someone well schooled in the faith and the complex hope of a thinking young Catholic. The result is a great start on a series of profiles we're calling Faith at Large. Patrick Birge is a fitting beginning for the series, which each month will look at Catholics, mostly lay people, in all manner of settings and occupations. Birge, spoke eloquently, if without intending it, to the aim of the series: "There's no way to have a purely Catholic art form unless it is derivative of another time period. We're living in a time of globalization, a time of convergence of religion, cultures and civilization. There's no way to live in that mix and not be changed. In a Catholic parish near where I live, a priest counted 80 different cultures in the surrounding neighborhood." ([See story](#))

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One who knows that convergence in a deep way is Sri Lankan theologian Fr. Tissa Balasuriya. The evening before the election of Pope Benedict XVI, I was with Balasuriya and a group of young Italians, most of whom were involved in nongovernmental organization work and as volunteers running a fair trade (in an earlier column I mistakenly used the term "free trade") store.

By now, most know the general outline of his story: He was excommunicated in January 1997 for views

expressed in his book *Mary and Human Liberation*, and was reinstated a year later after intense negotiations between Vatican officials and members of his order, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

During a walk in Rome, the 80-year-old theologian told me, “There are things I must say while I still have the time.”

Some of those things are in his essay; mostly they raise questions, worthy questions, for the Catholic community. ([✿ See story](#))

And if the strength of his gait on that Italian night, his wide smile, his energy and his ability to draw young people into deep discussion around pizza and a bottle of chianti are any measure, he'll have lots of time to say lots more.

-- **Tom Roberts**

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TEL: 816-531-0538 FAX: 1-816-968-2280 Send comments about this Web site to: [webkeeper@natcath.org](mailto:webkeeper@natcath.org)