

It's Noisy Out There. Let's Get Some Relief



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As we go to press with this issue, several matters of concern to many of us — some related to health care reform, others related to the economy in general — are getting considerable play in the national press.

One is the pace and content of reform itself, especially given the withdrawal of Tom Daschle from consideration to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, prompting questions about who will replace him.

Another is the terms of the economic stimulus package which, regardless of how it finally plays out, is unlikely to stem consternation and debate over specific content or economic philosophy for months to come.

Granted, these troubles, along with a myriad of others on our respective plates, may be resolved in more or less acceptable ways, but add them to the continuing avalanche of troubling economic news and consider it fortuitous that the church invites us in the weeks of Lent to transcend the world's cacophony and enter the silent spaces within and among us.

The practice of silence is, as we know, treasured by mystics of many faiths, who have described it as the space in which we can experience unity with God and others. People who, like me, tend to find pure silence unnerving, might be happy to learn, as I recently did, about the music of contemplative classical composer Arvo Pärt. (His music is said to be achieving something of a cult status among hospice workers, who say terminally ill patients have labeled it “angel music.”)

Since we can't always be silent or listen to music, Lent might be a good time to at least turn down the volume on our inevitable disagreements and concerns and reflect on the principles for dialogue set out by theologian Fr. Bernard Lonergan and discussed by ethicist Dan O'Brien on page 40 of this issue. Or perhaps to heed the wisdom in President Barack Obama's remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast in early February: “If we can talk to one another openly and honestly,” he said, “then perhaps old rifts will start to mend and new partnerships will begin to emerge. In a world that grows smaller by the day, perhaps we can begin to crowd out the destructive forces of zealotry and make room for the healing power of understanding.”

We don't expect to agree with the president on all things in the days ahead, but to that, in the spirit of Lent, we can easily say “Amen.”



Among our offerings in the pages ahead, we bring you a good bit of reading about the state of Catholic health care ethics and role of those responsible for it, along with some advice for leading health care through troubled economic waters, and a fascinating essay from authors of a new book on the history of medical ethics worldwide.

As always, we welcome your feedback on *Health Progress's* content and your suggestions for future topics.