



BRIEFS



**PRESIDENT ACCEPTS PEACE PRIZE —** U.S. President Barack Obama receives his medal and certificate from Nobel Committee Chairman Thorbjorn Jagland at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony at City Hall in Oslo, Norway, Dec. 10. (CNS photo by John McConnico, pool via Reuters)

**Obama: Religious extremists have 'warped view' of faith**

OSLO, Norway (CNS) — U.S. President Barack Obama, accepting the Nobel Peace Prize Dec. 10, said extremists who “kill in the name of God” have a “warped view of religion” that is incompatible with the purpose of faith. He also addressed the concept of just war and said faith in human progress is one of the best aspects of humanity, a “moral compass” or a “North Star that guides us on our journey.” Obama said that compared to some of the past Nobel Peace Prize winners his “accomplishments are slight.” He said perhaps the “most profound issue surrounding my receipt of this prize is the fact that I am the commander in chief of the military of a nation in the midst of two wars,” referring to Iraq and Afghanistan. “One of these wars is winding down. The other is a conflict that America did not seek, one in which we are joined by 42 other countries — including Norway — in an effort to defend ourselves and all nations from further attacks.” Obama said that, given the pace of globalization, it should not surprise anyone that “people fear the loss of what they cherish about their particular identities ... perhaps most powerfully, their religion,” and this has led to conflict. “Most dangerously, we see it in the way that religion is used to justify the murder of innocents by those who have distorted and defiled the great religion of Islam, and who attacked my country from Afghanistan,” he said.

**Recession helping couples to value marriage more, expert says**

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The economic recession may have a “silver lining” in terms of its effect on U.S. marriages, according to a leading marriage expert. “Judging by divorce trends, many couples appear to be developing a new appreciation for the economic and social support that marriage can provide in tough times,” said W. Bradford Wilcox, director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, in a report on “Marriage in America: The State of Our Unions 2009.” Wilcox, who also edited the report released Dec. 7, said millions of Americans have adopted what he called “a homegrown bailout strategy” and “are relying on their own marriages and families to weather this economic storm.” As evidence, Wilcox cited a decline in the divorce rates since the economic downturn

began in December 2007 from 17.5 per 1,000 married women to 16.9 per 1,000 married women in 2008. He said marriages also have been strengthened by a decision by many couples to shed credit card debt, with Americans decreasing their collective revolving debt by \$90 billion in the past year, according to the Federal Reserve Board.



**FILE PHOTO OF AMBASSADOR WILSON WITH POPE JOHN PAUL II —** William A. Wilson, the first U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, is greeted by Pope John Paul II at the Vatican in this 1985 file photo. (CNS photo)

**First U.S. ambassador to Vatican, William A. Wilson, dies at age 95**

CARMEL, Calif. (CNS) — The first U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, William A. Wilson, died Dec. 5 at his home in Carmel. He was 95 and had been ill with cancer, his family reported. Wilson was a longtime friend and political adviser to President Ronald Reagan when he was named the president’s personal envoy to the Vatican in 1981. Three years later, when Congress repealed an 1867 law prohibiting full diplomatic relations with the Holy See, Wilson’s position was elevated to that of ambassador. He served in the post until May 1986, when he resigned to return to private life. Wilson was a Los Angeles native who stepped into his father’s oil tool business in 1938, eventually managing it until it was sold in 1955. His business interests subsequently involved Southern California real estate investment, cattle ranching in the United States and Mexico and roles on the corporate boards of companies including Pennzoil.

**Homilist says Archbishop Sheen knew Jesus was 'way to heaven'**

NEW YORK (CNS) — The purpose of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen’s philosophy and theology, radio and TV programs, books, articles, retreats and conferences was “to help us discover the purpose of life — eternal union with God,” said Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York. “His pivotal insight, central to revelation, was that Jesus Christ was the way to heaven, the truth about how to get there, the life we hope to share for all eternity,” he said a homily Dec. 9 at St. Patrick Cathedral. The archbishop was the principal celebrant of a Mass at the cathedral to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the death of Archbishop Sheen. Masses were celebrated in all 50 states and in 35 countries — including Pakistan, Fiji and the Czech Republic — to mark the anniversary and to promote the late archbishop’s cause for canonization, formally opened by the Vatican in 2003. Boise Bishop Michael P. Driscoll is a member of the episcopal advisory board advocating for Archbishop Sheen’s beatification.

From the Vatican...



**POPE RECEIVES CREDENTIALS OF NEW CUBAN AMBASSADOR —** The new Cuban ambassador to the Vatican, Eduardo Delgado Bermudez, presents his credentials to Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican Dec. 10. (CNS photo by L'Osservatore Romano)

By Catholic News Service

Welcoming Cuba’s new ambassador to the Vatican, Pope Benedict XVI once again criticized the U.S. economic embargo against the country, but also called on the Cuban government to expand religious freedom on the island. The pope told Ambassador Eduardo Delgado Bermudez Dec. 10 that he knows Cubans are suffering from the economic crisis, which “together with the devastating effects of natural disasters and the economic embargo particularly strikes poorer people and their families.” Pope Benedict said he hoped that the “signs of detente in relations with the nearby United States would signal new opportunities for a mutually beneficial rapprochement.” In his speech to the pope, Delgado described the embargo as “cruel and unilateral” and said that it “constitutes an act of genocide because it aims at making our heroic and generous people surrender out of hunger, sickness and poverty.” The financial crisis, the pope said, highlights “the urgent need for an economy that is built on solid ethical bases and places the person and his or her rights and material and spiritual well-being at the center of its interests.”

The Vatican and the world’s largest particle physics laboratory, CERN, plan an informal exchange of scientists. The Geneva-based laboratory would like to invite an astronomer from the Vatican Observatory to collaborate on studies concerning the origin of the universe, said Ugo Amaldi, a professor of medical physics and president of the TERA Foundation, which works closely with CERN in finding ways to apply atomic research in treating cancer. CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, “is an international and European (facility), and to have the Vatican Observatory send some or one of its young scientists will be something that is extremely important,” he said. He made his comments during a Dec. 10 Vatican press conference launching the Italian-language version of “The Heavens Proclaim,” a book about the history of the Vatican and astronomy. The head of the Vatican Observatory, Jesuit Father Jose Funes, said during the book presentation that he hopes Gabriele Gionti, a young Vatican astronomer who will be ordained in June, will be involved in the CERN collaboration. Gionti has a doctorate in physics and specializes in quantum gravity, and he is finishing his theology studies at the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley, Calif.

The statues, paintings and mosaics of Mary found in the churches of Rome, its public squares and on street-corner shrines should help the city’s visitors and residents treat each other with more respect, Pope Benedict XVI said. Marking the feast of the Immaculate Conception Dec. 8, Pope Benedict rode in the popemobile from the Vatican to the heart of Rome’s tourist and shopping district to pay homage to Mary at a statue erected near the Spanish Steps. “The mother of God teaches us to open ourselves to the action of God, to see others as he sees them — starting from the heart. And to look upon them with mercy, with love (and) with infinite tenderness, especially those who are most alone, despised and exploited,” the pope said. Rome, like any big city, is filled with people who are invisible until some scandal lands them on the front page of the newspaper or the television news where they are “exploited to the very end, as long as the news and images attract attention,” the pope said. “It is a perverse mechanism, which unfortunately is hard to resist,” he said.

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