

**TERRORISTS** are wreaking havoc all around the globe, and it is obvious that Al Qaeda is alive and deadly, if not well. Thus, the Bush administration is faced with a stark choice: Focus on protecting Americans by continuing the fight against terrorism, or risk American lives by setting the world further aflame with an unnecessary war against Iraq.

The world has become a very ugly place. A murderous bombing in Bali, Indonesia. Plans to hit U.S. embassies in Southeast Asia and Europe. An attack on a French oil tanker off of Yemen. A failed plot against Saudi oil facilities. Shootings of American soldiers in Kuwait. Bombings in the Philippines. And the arrest of terrorist wannabes in Portland, Oregon, and Buffalo, New York. CIA Director George Tenet warns: "You must make the assumption that al-Qaeda is in an execution phase and intends to strike us both here and overseas."

Throughout the Muslim world, hatred for the West continues to grow. Palestinians and Israelis are at war. Fundamentalists made dramatic electoral gains in Pakistan and Turkey, both American allies. A new report by the Council on Foreign Relations charges that Saudi Arabia, another ally, has done little to stop the funding of Al Qaeda.

In such a world, attacking Iraq would be like sloshing gasoline from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. It would not take much of a spark to ignite a bloody conflagration.

Why is the Bush administration fixated on Baghdad? Obviously, Saddam Hussein is a bad man. But the United States has routinely befriended nasty actors: Turkey has treated her Kurds no better than has Iraq, and a Christian woman would be better off living in Iraq than in Saudi Arabia. Baghdad has attacked its neighbors, but it is contained and constrained, far weaker today than in 1990. That is not likely to change anytime soon.

Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran in war and, perhaps, against the Kurds in civil war. Worrisome? Yes, but Saddam only used these weapons against adversaries who were defenseless. By contrast, the United States possesses 6,000 nuclear warheads.

Saddam is trying to develop nuclear weapons. He's not alone, however. North

Korea has just admitted an ongoing program. Iran and other states have pursued them. Moreover, Saddam could not use nukes against the United States or Israel if he had them, lest he face swift retaliation. Saddam is wicked, not suicidal.

Still, we are warned: He might use those weapons to preclude the United States from attacking him. Yet a world in which Washington feels free to bomb any country at any time is frightening. The United States spent the entire Cold War facing a nuclear-armed Soviet Union that constrained its actions.

The most serious argument is that Baghdad's possession of nuclear weapons could result in even worse terrorism. Al Qaeda, however, thinks little better of secular Arab dictators than of Western democracies. Daniel Benjamin, a former staffer on the National Security Council, calls Iraq and Al Qaeda "natural enemies."

Saddam is not likely to turn the crown jewels of any weapons program over to a group that he does not control—especially since doing so would risk exposure. Indeed, he would be immediately suspect if "weapons of mass destruction" are ever used against the United States by terrorists—and the city of Baghdad would likely cease to exist.

The problem of loose nukes is far worse elsewhere. Pakistan possesses nuclear weapons and apparently aided the North Korean nuclear program.

Equally frightening, however, is what war with Iraq might bring. If there were any circumstance in which Saddam would loose—on both America and Israel—whatever chemical or biological weapons he possesses, it would be if the United States attempted to remove him from power.

Moreover, any war would divert resources from fighting a resurgent Al Qaeda—at a time when, warns Tenet, "the [terrorist] threat environment we find ourselves in today is as bad as it was last summer, the summer before Sept. 11."

Attacking Iraq is also likely to reduce cooperation with Arab states and, perhaps, European and Asian ones as well. Yet their help is needed in order to crack down on local terrorist cells and stem the flow of funds.

Even if the power of the "Arab street" is often overstated, the Pakistani election

demonstrates Muslim anger against the West. To oust Saddam while seeing the government of Pervez Musharraf fall to extremists would be a losing bargain.

And we must consider the aftermath of war in Iraq itself. Even if a U.S. victory generated dancing in the streets of Baghdad, a permanent U.S. military occupation might be necessary to hold that artificial country together.

The struggle between Kurdish and Shiite separatists, squabbling expatriates, and various domestic factions, along with potential belligerent actions by Iran and Turkey, would be a wonder to behold. Nation-building in Afghanistan would be simple in comparison.

In the end, the Bush administration is pursuing a strategy in which Iraq and the terrorist attacks of September 11 are merely a convenient excuse. The United States is to play an imperial role, crushing any government or movement that desires to escape Washington's control.

It is a breathtaking agenda, outlined in a new White House strategy document—an agenda that means perpetual war, increased military outlays, a return to a Cold War-style security state, and perhaps even the reinstitution of conscription to man the necessary "nation-building" garrisons around the globe. It is an agenda for an empire, not a republic. And it is a strategy that guarantees a long-term, concerted campaign by other nations to counteract American power by means fair or foul. India's development of a nuclear arsenal is but one example.

Consider, also, China's warming relations with India, Indonesia, and Russia. Growing criticism from Europe. Greater independence by Japan. None of these countries wants to live in a world where everything Washington says goes.

There is no more fundamental duty for the government than to protect its people from outside threats. Unfortunately, as President Bush himself admits, "We've got a long way to go" to defeat Al Qaeda. Yet his administration is preparing to increase vastly the danger to Americans and their friends abroad.

—Doug Bandow

**WILLIAM "HOOTIE" JOHNSON**, age 71, poor man, has fallen afoul of public opinion and sensibilities, for which

the consequences thus far were entirely predictable: the scorn of the best newspapers; hospitalization for a coronary-artery bypass, an aortic aneurism repair, and an aortic valve replacement; now, news of restlessness on the part of the natives.

Might not any of us expect something similar after instructing the National Council of Women's Organizations to go—please, ma'am—to the hot place? Augusta National Golf Club, site of the prestigious Masters tournament, didn't wish to offer itself as another candidate for cultural and political intimidation.

Every institution stuffed with white males, symbols and enforcers of the Old Order is, nowadays, a candidate for intimidation. In Augusta National's case, the offense was failure to admit women as members. The NCWO, with an estimated six million members through 160 groups, sent a letter to Hootie, in his capacity as Augusta chairman. The message: *It's time for a change*. "We know that Augusta National and the sponsors of the Masters do not want to be viewed as entities that tolerate discrimination against any group, including women."

Hootie gained national attention for replying with, shall we say, acerbity. *No way, lady*. Augusta National would not be "bullied, threatened, or intimidated." This from a white man with an impressive civil-rights record that has been accorded at least glancing attention, mostly as a source of ironic commentary. July became Beat Up on Hootie Month, and it went on from there.

*Let 'em in*, demanded the commentators. *No way*, Hootie repeated, dropping all three sponsors for the 2003 Masters, lest the NCWO lean on them to lean on him. The incredulous looks spread. What was this, a golf club or Jurassic Park? By late September, the *New York Times* reported, with a look of satisfaction, various club members were trying to iron the thing out and spare themselves further embarrassment.

The question of Augusta National membership is one properly of supreme indifference to nonmembers. You would suppose if, in a land of liberty, Augusta National, or any other private association, chose to admit only cross-eyed Fiji Islanders, that would be the members' prerogative. On its self-selection policies, the association would stand or fall. This quaint manner of proceeding is known as the free-market approach. It is no bad idea.

Why do private organizations no longer qualify for free-market discipline?

Because, in modern America, personal validation has come to trump almost everything else. Americans exist, it would appear, to be affirmed: built up, patted on the hand, protected from low self-esteem.

We all remember the scandal of a couple of years back when the Boys Scouts declined to accept homosexuals who wished to be identified as such. The scouts, a noble and historic organization, got jerked around by the lanyard. Didn't they understand homosexuals wanted in?! Yes, they understood. Then why couldn't homosexuals get in? Because letting them in, to tout their gayness, would have undermined the Scouts' moral commitments. A thing like that came before making particular non-members happy? Well, yes, it did; and, in due course, the federal courts, who had been dragged into this thing, agreed with the Scouts. A private, character-building organization had nonetheless been exposed to ridicule and unnecessary expense, all because it wanted to defend its essential identity.

Back to the matter of women as members of Augusta National. Should they be allowed to become such? *Why not?* most Americans would likely reply, *provided that's what the present membership desires*. And if the members don't desire? We will need, in that case, someone to explain why the historic right of association has been shanked into the woods; why "opportunities" and "positive feelings" have come to preempt others' asserted right to their own preferences.

There is about it all something of the beneficent tyranny of the fifth grade—the little animals made, not to bash and scandalize and insult one another, but, instead, to play nicely together. Careful, teacher is taking names.

Has it come to this—modern life as the fifth grade reconstructed and given cultural force? It might not be the worst thing that could happen. In the fifth-grade zoo, the animals are kept at least from mauling each other. Do-gooders and hand-patters have their undoubted value in a society—like ours—where strong passions contend strongly with one another.

And so have the Hootie Johnsons their special value. Too much do-gooding, too much nicely-nicely, tends to chafe. When a Hootie Johnson plays bad boy—sticking out his tongue and his chest—the impulse is to applaud.

Hootie is an old coot, a so-and-so of genius. This is a profound reason to hope

his heart gets back to ticking soundly so that he may go after his would-be intimidators with hammer and tongs. There aren't enough of his stubborn like in this pallid, back-patting, hand-holding, esteem-building age. Long may he rave.

—William Murchison

**A U.N. RESOLUTION** concerning weapons inspections in Iraq made October a month for hard bargaining among Washington, Paris, and Moscow. Washington and London both desired a resolution that would allow the automatic application of force should Iraq obstruct any proposed arms inspections. Paris and Moscow balked, but by mid-October it appeared that both the French and Russians were prepared to accept a U.S. proposal allowing for further Security Council consultations before any attack on Baghdad could be launched.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov explicitly stated that Moscow might agree to the use of force against Iraq if Baghdad interfered with arms inspections. Thus, the United States appeared to be offering a face-saving option for the Security Council, one that brought the United Nations into the Iraq equation (after President Bush had already signed Congress's resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq, an implicit threat to act unilaterally if the Security Council would not compromise).

But the real story of the Iraq resolution bargaining probably had less to do with the Security Council's view of the position and status of the United Nations than it did with the economic interests of France and Russia, both of which have staked a claim in developing Iraq's oil fields—and both of which were very concerned that U.S.-based companies would drive them out in the event of "regime change" in Baghdad.

A U.S. presence in Central Asia (a U.S.-backed oil-and-gas pipeline, to be routed through Afghanistan and Pakistan, is in the works), Washington's interference in Georgia (a prime pipeline route for transporting Caspian Sea oil and gas, bypassing Russia), and possible occupation of oil-rich Iraq by the Americans might cut cash-strapped Russia out of any future OPEC-busting hydrocarbon alliances. So Russia threatened war with Georgia and attempted to obstruct any U.S. plans for an immediate strike on Iraq, moves most pundits saw as part of an elaborate game through which Moscow

hoped to gain a stake in the New Hydrocarbon World Order envisioned by Washington.

October saw the Putin regime bargaining hard (*torg* in Russian) over what was really bugging the Russian president: oil, the state budget, Russian relations with the Arab world, and economic opportunities in the West. Among the *torg*-related events were a 48-hour blitz visit to Moscow by Tony Blair, who told reporters afterward that “the Russians are ready to approve” some “pretty tough language” in a revamped U.N. resolution; talks between the Saudi finance minister and Russian officials over “developing trade and economic relations” between the two countries; a Putin meeting with Moroccan King Mohammed VI, focusing on Iraq; an announcement that the United Arab Emirates was interested in purchasing an air-defense system from a Russian firm, which was viewed in Moscow as a sign that the United States and Great Britain were ready to let Russia in on the lucrative Persian Gulf arms market; the removal of Russia from the international Financial Action Task Force’s money-laundering blacklist, possibly a U.S.-U.K. bone tossed to Putin’s Kremlin; Russian oil executives’ attendance at a Houston oil-industry summit, where U.S. officials hinted they might view Russia as an alternative (to OPEC) oil supplier; a discussion of “regime change” in Baghdad between Russian and Kuwaiti officials; media reports that the United States and Britain were prepared to pressure Moscow’s Western creditors to write off Russian debts; and U.S. protests over Moscow’s alleged nuclear-research cooperation with Syria.

Meanwhile, Sergey Kukura, vice president of Russian oil giant Lukoil, was released by his kidnappers even as the hydrocarbon *torg* proceeded. Kukura, as reported by Denis Petrov (*Cultural Revolutions*, November), was kidnapped in September—and the Moscow rumor mill claimed that the oil executive was the victim of wrangling among Russia’s oil oligarchs, some of whom allegedly wanted Lukoil, which has an interest in Russia’s Caspian Sea oil-and-gas projects and owns the rights to develop Iraq’s largest oil field, to pursue a line of cooperation with the United States. And it is possible that those oligarchs who are interested in breaking into the U.S. market may have had something to do with the bizarre Kukura saga: Some sources claim no ransom was paid for Kukura’s release,

and Lukoil President Vagit Alekperov, who attended the Houston oil summit, has refused to comment on the episode.

—Wayne Allensworth

**PALEOCONSERVATIVES** often refer to “the limits of permissible dissent” in describing the struggle to hold on to their views in the realms of the media and academia against the censure of both the left and the “mainstream” right. Now, this struggle has been extended into the realm of the internet, the supposed last frontier of unregulated speech and capitalism. Indeed, we may be witnesses, as Frederick Jackson Turner would say, to the closing of this frontier, not just because of the collapse of the dot-com economy but because of the new limits imposed on speech and content, which will only become more pronounced as the War on Terrorism progresses.

In 1996, Fresno, California, resident and internet surfer Jim Robinson had a problem: His posts on Prodigy message boards and chat rooms, particularly his strong criticisms of President Bill Clinton, were being censored by Prodigy’s administrators. So he started his own website—*Free Republic* ([www.freerepublic.com](http://www.freerepublic.com)).

*Free Republic* was more than just an ordinary message board in the early settlement of the internet. Surfers could post whole articles from publications and make them topics of discussion and debate. And it was more than just another chat room. *Free Republic*’s likeminded members could be connected from across the country to organize activist projects and events. In 1998, when many Republicans wanted to ignore Kenneth Starr’s report on the Clinton scandals rather than deal with its charges, *Free Republic* members (or “Freepers,” as they call themselves) lit up the congressional phones and organized demonstrations that influenced Republicans in the House to vote for articles of impeachment. And it was the Freepers, not the GOP, who organized the demonstrations of conservatives down in Florida during the 2000 presidential vote recount.

Over 60,000 people have been registered members of *Free Republic*, the largest conservative-oriented website in the world. Members are a diverse lot: independents, Republicans, libertarians, (large “L” and small), neocons, paleocons, Buchanan Brigaders, Keyes supporters—and everything in between. Even such prominent pundits as Justin

Raimondo, Ann Coulter, Barbara Olson, and Lucianne Goldberg (known by her Freeper handle, “Trixie,”) have made frequent posts.

As in any frontier boomtown, however, with rapid growth came predictable problems. Some of the articles posted on the site came from racist or antisemitic websites. Conspiracy theorists also made use of *Free Republic*. Leftists began to infiltrate the site, posting articles or posing as conservatives to act as *agents provocateurs*. “Vanity posts” became more frequent, and flame wars among members became more intense, as the site split into factions during the 2000 presidential election. Overall, civility degenerated. Some members became concerned that *Free Republic* had become a virtual hangout for kooks. Matters came to a head in early 2000 when Robinson (or “JimRob”) speculated on George W. Bush’s connection to the airport in Mena, Arkansas, where drug- and gun-running allegedly took place during the 1980’s. Matt Drudge then dropped *Free Republic*’s link from the *Drudge Report*, and Goldberg took 2,000 members with her to start her own *Lucianne.com*.

Robinson decided to clean up his website and, like any good sheriff, deputized a posse of site moderators to remove offensive posts, threads, and articles and to ban those who posted them. But they did not stop there. Soon, they had banned the posting of any articles from certain websites that they deemed taboo, such as *VDare.com* (“too divisive”), *LewRockwell.com*, *DixieNet.org* (the League of the South’s website), and the Free State Project’s website ([www.FreeStateProject.org](http://www.FreeStateProject.org)).

It would be easy to conclude that Robinson and his monitors simply went overboard in an effort to clean up the excesses of *Free Republic*, but there is more to it than that.

Because of its significant growth, *Free Republic* costs \$240,000 annually to maintain. As a non-profit, *Free Republic* depends on donors, large and small, for its survival. No doubt the embarrassment of being dropped from the *Drudge Report* and Goldberg’s public break with the site concerned Robinson, and he feared that funds might dry up if his site were perceived to be on the fringe. In addition, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* sued *Free Republic* for copyright infringement. (The case was settled out of court.) It was only natural for Robinson and his site administrators to want to look good for prospective donors.



With so many posters banned, the diversity of thought on *Free Republic* has been reduced to the musings of neoconservatives, Zionists, Republicans who act as if *Free Republic* were an annex of GOP headquarters, those who consider George W. Bush a demigod and offer daily prayers to him, and other sycophants and cheerleaders. Robinson has made it clear where he stands: "I see that the only Party capable of blocking and defeating the evil Democrats is the Republican Party. I see that many races are so close that as little as a one percent siphon of conservative votes to a third party could be the difference between success and failure. I see allowing a Democrat to remain in power when it could have been prevented as a triumph of evil."

Many banned Freepers have turned to such sites as *Liberty Post* ([www.liberty-post.org](http://www.liberty-post.org)) and *Liberty Forum* ([www.liberty-forum.org](http://www.liberty-forum.org)), where members can post articles from anywhere and comment without interference from the thought police or fear of Siberian banishment. But *Free Republic* will still remain the 800-pound gorilla of conservative websites for some time, just as *National Review* has been for conservative magazines, despite being watered down. Frontiers, whether on land or in cyberspace, cannot survive when developers start plotting out the fence-rows.

—Sean Scallon

**SERBIA's** recent presidential election failed to muster enough votes to be valid. Only 46 percent of voters cast ballots in the run-off between current Yugoslav president Vojislav Kostunica and his rival, Miroljub Labus. Kostunica beat Labus by a two-to-one margin, but, without the minimum turnout of 50 percent, the outcome was void.

What happens next is uncertain. In theory, the whole procedure should be repeated within 60 days, according to legislation inherited from Milosevic's time. In practice, however, there may be difficulties. If voters could not be motivated to turn out sufficient numbers for the first runoff, there is no reason to believe that things will be different in late December. The full extent of Serbia's economic misery and collective depression will be more painfully felt under the leaden winter sky, deepening the sense of alienation from politics, and the futility of its proceedings, so keenly felt by most Serbs.

On the other hand, if the 50-percent

requirement introduced by Milosevic is to be removed, it will be necessary to draft the necessary legislation and bring it before the Serbian parliament within days. The majority in the assembly, however, is controlled by Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic and his allies in a dozen microscopic parties. That control was enhanced by Djindjic's expulsion of deputies belonging to Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) on a spurious pretext—a move that even Djindjic's foreign backers find hard to defend. If Kostunica is reinstalled as president, he is certain to call a new parliamentary election. Since Djindjic and his allies would fare badly at the polls, they are not likely to do anything that would place Kostunica in a position to dissolve parliament.

An ongoing power vacuum at the top suits Djindjic and his allies, enabling them to continue running the government by default. Djindjic's ploy was evident in his Democratic Party's (DS) quiet sabotage of the second round of voting. He may come under some pressure from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which monitored the elections and said that the law should be repealed. Such pressure would never be effective, however, unless Djindjic were given some guarantee that he would retain a position of power and influence. Western diplomats in Belgrade point out that, regardless of the outcome of a future parliamentary election, Djindjic's DS will likely remain the only coalition partner for Kostunica's DSS: "The alternative is to make a deal with Seselj's Radicals or Milosevic's Socialists, and Kostunica knows that he cannot even contemplate such a move without losing what little Western support and credibility he still enjoys."

Another failed election would further erode Kostunica's credibility and effectively leave him without a job: The post of the federal head of state will become purely ceremonial, and subject to rotation every six months, once the new constitutional platform regulating relations between Serbia and Montenegro is enacted. If there is another electoral flop, Djindjic could resort to another constitutional trick inherited from Milosevic: He could install the temporary speaker of Serbia's parliament—a nondescript woman from one of the miniparties allied with him—as acting president of Serbia for a period of up to one year, while the new legislation is being drafted and debated.

For a cynic such as Djindjic, devoid of

moral scruples, the possibility of extending his rule over Serbia for a year may prove irresistible, especially if his long-suffering subjects remain apathetic. But, as we saw in the streets of Belgrade two years ago, Serbian apathy may easily turn into rage.

—Srdja Trifkovic

**OBITER DICTA:** Our first poet this month is **Richard Moore** from Belmont, Massachusetts. Mr. Moore is the author of nine books of poetry, as well as translations of Plautus and Euripides, a book of literary essays, and a novel, *The Investigator*. His most recent book of verse, *The Naked Scarecrow*, was published by the Truman State University Press in 2000. Mr. Moore conducts The Poetry Exchange in the Harvard COOP and gives frequent readings in the Boston area.

Our second poet this month is **Alfred Nicol**. His poetry will be included in an anthology titled *Contemporary Poets of New England*, edited by Robert Pack and Jay Parini. His work has appeared in the *New England Review*, *Atlanta Review*, the *Formalist*, *Rattapallax*, *Pivot*, and *Commonweal*. A member of the Powow River Poets, he lives in Amesbury, Massachusetts, where he teaches poetry and creative writing at Sparhawk School.

This month's inside illustrations are provided by our art director, **H. Ward Sterett** of Roscoe, Illinois. Mr. Sterett received his B.F.A. from the University of Colorado and his M.F.A. from Northern Illinois University, and he attended the L'Abri Fellowship, where he studied the effect of Christianity on art. He currently works as a sculptor, painter, and printmaker in Roscoe.

The **White Angel** of this month's cover is a fresco painting from Mileseva Monastery near Uzice in western Serbia. The monastery was built in the early 14th century by Stefan Vladislav. Within the narthex of Mileseva, Vladislav deposited the bones of his uncle, St. Sava, the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In the long centuries of Turkish oppression, Mileseva was a source of inspiration and hope to Christian Serbs. The Turks burned down the church several times and even dug up the saint's bones in 1594 and burned them at the stake in Belgrade. The sacrilege ignited a series of uprisings against the brutality of Islamic rule. The *White Angel* remains a symbol of hope to the world's beleaguered Christians.

## Boethius and/or Cassiodorus

American conservatives used to be fond of saying that the United States have entered a decadent period something like that of the Roman Empire. Since American conservatives do not read history, they were never very clear on the period they had in mind, but let us assume they mean the third century, when the empire was up for sale to the highest bidder, when gangster armies fought over the spoils of the empire, when Oriental emperors such as Elagabalus stained the city's ancient streets with vice unknown in the more wholesome days of Nero and Caligula.

Apart from the disorders, however, the empire was not a lost cause in the third and fourth centuries, largely because of the solid virtues of the class that produced the officers and bureaucrats who organized the defenses, kept the roads and aqueducts in repair, and maintained some semblance of public order. We who live in the age of *The Osbournes* can hardly afford to sneer at an age that produced St. Augustine and St. Ambrose or Julian and Ammianus Marcellinus.

Alas, we are not living in the age of Caligula or Commodus or even in the age of Honorius and Arcadius, Theodosius' two incompetent sons. This is not the period before the collapse of civilization: In a moral and cultural sense, at least, the collapse has already taken place. Like the collapse of the Roman West, the modern West's failure has been a gradual process, and, like the proverbial frog in the kettle, we have so gradually grown used to the heat that we are hardly aware of the bubbles boiling around us. On a spiritual level, the collapse began perhaps 500 years ago, but on a cultural and moral plane, the stench of decay was already perceptible before the first World War.

Poets, though not the legislators of mankind, are the secular prophets who are the first to realize and declare what is going on, and the poets of the teens and 20's—Eliot, Pound, and Jeffers—were clear: Civilization was almost extinct. Pound, lamenting the mass slaughter of the Great War, puts it succinctly:

There died a myriad,  
And of the best, among them,

For an old bitch gone in the teeth,  
For a botched civilization.

The proper place to look for parallels is not in the declining years of the Roman Empire but in the period after the barbarian takeover of Italy, Gaul, and Britain, when no one knew exactly what to expect except for a steady deterioration of what we jokingly today refer to as the "quality of life." During this Gothic period, from Alaric's sack of Rome (in 410) to the death of Cassiodorus (about 580), the task of civilized Romans was to stay alive, hold on to their property, and pass down some of their institutions to their descendants. From any perspective, whether of cultural or even material survival, the future was not bright.

Though the West was becoming increasingly Christian, this was no Golden Age of the primitive Church. When an open war broke out in Rome over who would sit in the chair of St. Peter, the pagan prefect told the winner, Pope Damasus, that he would gladly turn Christian if only he could have the wealth and power of the Pope. It is a mistake, perhaps a heresy, to imagine that any church was ever any different. Mankind being what it is, the Church was corrupt even in the time of the Apostles—as is revealed by the story of Ananias and Sapphira and by St. Paul's constant complaints about moral disorders and dissensions. Even in Jesus's time, his followers quarreled over precedence and over priorities, and one of them, perhaps in disgust at Jesus's refusal to lead a social revolution, betrayed his Master. In many significant ways, the Church, during Her first millennium, improved more than She deteriorated.

Though Romans had nominally ruled the West down to 476, real power was exercised not in Rome but in Milan and Ravenna, whose degenerate rulers hardly cared what happened to the Eternal City. Alaric's sack of Rome was a terrible shock to the world, and when Emperor Honorius, who was a poultry fancier, heard the news that *Roma* had been destroyed, he broke out in grief and astonishment, thinking that his prize rooster named *Roma* had been killed. "I just saw her this morning," he complained. Once his courtiers

reassured him that it was only the city, he felt a good deal better.

Italy finally lost the pretense of Roman rule once Odovacar the German deposed the last puppet emperor in 476. Odovacar attempted to preserve the structure of the empire and kept the imperial tax system and Roman officials in place, reserving the right to relax taxes whenever he wished to do a favor to a friend or gain popularity. Neither he nor Theodoric, the rival who murdered him, was up to the task, however. The economy was in shambles; agriculture, in ruins. Skilled trades were disappearing from want of work, and greedy barbarians were swarming in to take over farms they did not intend to work.

Much of what Theodoric did in Italy was a continuation of Odovacar's policy: exercise power through the Gothic soldiers and keep the administration going, wherever possible, by making use of Roman officials like Boethius and Cassiodorus. The Goths were assigned a full third of the lands. There were roughly 200,000 fighting men, whose numbers, filled out by women and children, must have added up to a million—a small number, really. In those days, there was not much assimilation among the immigrants. Few Goths learned Latin, and virtually none could read. The king approved of their ignorance: "A child who feared the schoolmaster's rod," declared Theodoric, "would never wield the sword." He also seems to have adopted the strategy of divide-and-rule—he was the only man who could control both the Goths and the Romans. Although he is praised for his astute statesmanship, Theodoric could never have succeeded in establishing a stable kingdom in an Italy divided into two nations.

Theodoric and most of his Goths were Arian heretics, denying the full divinity of the Son of God, but although the Arians were well known as vicious persecutors of their more numerous Catholic rivals, Theodoric was wise enough to attempt moderation, though he did intervene in Church affairs and even nominated a pope in Ravenna rather than in Rome. He exasperated Catholic feelings when he compelled an entire community to re-