

DIMENSIONS

**NEWSLETTER OF THE THOMAS MORE CENTER
FOR THE STUDY OF CATHOLIC THOUGHT & CULTURE**

Rockhurst University

Vol. 24, March 2008

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Family

Samuel Johnson once famously remarked, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." His intent, of course, was not to demean patriotism but the scoundrels who often resort to appeals to that virtue when they have no other valid argument.

I would suggest that in today's world, the same is true of family. Family has become the common denominator for all appeals to virtue. Reference to family as the final arbiter unites conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats, church and unchurched, young and old, rich and poor. Of course, definitions of family (like patriotism) might differ, but the common thread is that the concept of family provides the ultimate cement that bonds society together, and the common prescription for what ails us.

And that tendency should not surprise us. For the vast majority of human beings, family represents an ideal of comfort, security, happiness and fulfillment. Whether a person has or ever had a family is irrelevant – to both the fortunate people who enjoyed the benefits of family, and those who suffered the want of family, the appeal to family is paramount. Those who have or had family want to consolidate or recapture familial bonds, those who have never had family mourn their absence. Both idealize the virtues of family, both long for its benefits.

Our tendency to idealize family makes it particularly painful when the institution fails to live up to its promises. When reality intrudes on the ideal – and reality has a nasty habit of intrusion – the hurt is multiplied. In today's world the family faces countless pressures, both external and internal. Families are vulnerable to physical and cultural shifts and factors, like economic downturns, crime, violence, addiction, disease and numerous other natural and man-made disasters.

When internal pressures threaten the family, the frustration and pain is even more pronounced. Emotional warfare results, with all the psychological and verbal atrocities of a civil war. Parents belittle children, children ridicule parents, siblings take sides, charges are leveled, counter-charges are hurled, long ago (but unforgotten) resentments are resurfaced, baggage is unloaded, cheap punches become the current of the day, the grounds of the initial argument are quickly lost in a storm of pent-up anger and pain.

And real differences do emerge that can threaten family stability, even in close families, perhaps most especially in close families, where past intimacies raise expectations and provide ammunition for future conflicts. Sociologists talk

about the “tyrannies of intimacy” in close communities. The family is a veritable hotbed for such tyrannies.

What are family members to do in such situations, when what should be the comforts of family become the cause of conflict itself? In such cases, reason rarely prevails. Indeed, reason becomes the next “last refuge” of the injured party. The best that can happen is that, at such times, something (or someone) will eventually remind the family of what holds them together in the first place. In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, the emotionally troubled Tom and Daisy Buchanan ultimately close ranks around each other after their dysfunctions result in tragedy for others. Nick Carraway, the narrator, observes that after the debacle they “retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together.” Nick makes no secret of the fact that he despises their shallow callousness, but a grudging admiration lingers for the naivete that allowed them to stay together and sleep soundly at night. They are ultimately dysfunctional, and even dangerous, but somehow they lived with that knowledge.

I am not holding up Fitzgerald’s fictional Tom and Daisy as models for emotional maturity, just observing the practical reality that various forces sometimes hold relationships together. In the best of families and communities, those forces are positive. In the best of families and communities, those forces are celebrated as virtues to be embraced and emulated. They create the model that has become our last refuge for sanity.

In a small book entitled *Five Great Catholic Ideas*, Father Edward Clark suggests that a bedrock concept of Catholicism remains the belief that “we are saved in community.” The Church, united under the Father and the Son, becomes a family bound by mutual love, respect and belief. The Church provides the resources necessary for our salvation. Like a family, however, the Church too is vulnerable to division and conflict. Disagreement leads to argument, and division threatens communal unity. In those cases, all that holds true of families holds true of the Church.

In the midst of dissent and division, the Church, like the family, must rediscover what holds it together in the first place. Rational argument and debate will not prevail. As Thomas More recognized in the play *A Man For All Seasons* when his daughter Margaret tried to argue rationally for his capitulation to the Act of Supremacy before she finally broke down into tears begging for his return home, “Well, finally. . . finally it’s not about reason; finally it’s about love.”

In times of internal Church conflict, the community is reminded of what (and who) defines it as a community. The limits of reason are exposed by the

harsh realities of life in the here and now. The Holy Spirit is left to the work of reconciliation, beginning with the realization of love and faith. Like the family in crisis, the church must hope that when reason (and its inevitable complement of irrationality) fails, we will remember (or be reminded of) what holds us together. This remembrance does not make division or discord any less real, just less overwhelming.

Richard J. Janet

Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation
A Book Review

Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006.

The author is formerly lecturer in Old Testament, biblical theology, and hermeneutics at Moore Theological College, Sydney. The book grows out of his classroom teaching of evangelical hermeneutics to fourth-year undergraduates. His goals are threefold, which correspond to the three parts of the book. In Part I, he explores the foundations and presuppositions of evangelical belief, especially as it applies to the interpretation of the biblical text. In Part II, he surveys hermeneutical developments from early Christianity to today. In Part III, he lays out his plan for reconstructing a “truly evangelical, gospel-centered hermeneutics.” (15)

This book is clearly written by an evangelical for evangelicals. And therein lays its limited usefulness for anyone not identified with that tradition. For Goldsworthy, hermeneutical principles that are grounded in the gospel inevitably coincide with evangelical and Reformed Christianity. So, for example, the presuppositions necessary for a gospel-centered hermeneutic happen to be the four “solas” of the Reformation – grace alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, and faith alone, and these four principles represent for Goldsworthy a recovery of the “pure doctrines of the apostolic gospel.” (46)

The lengthiest section of the book, Part II, surveys challenges to evangelical hermeneutics, that is, “alien influences that have affected biblical interpretation from sub-apostolic times to the present.” (87) Each of the 8 chapters in this section begins with the title “The Eclipse of the Gospel in . . .”, followed by a specific “alien influence” that is exposed. The author sets out to

focus on “the major philosophical influences that have impinged negatively on Christian biblical interpretation in certain periods of the church’s history.” (90) The various “eclipses” of the gospel are found in the early church, the medieval church, Roman Catholicism, liberalism, philosophical hermeneutics, historical criticism, literary criticism, and evangelicalism.

Predictably, the culprit responsible for the eclipse of the gospel in the early church is the use of allegory, along with a focus on “the exemplary and ethical Christ, rather than on the substitutionary and redemptive Christ.” (92) For Goldsworthy, what emerges from the early church is “the invasion of nonbiblical philosophical frameworks” (91), producing “the deleterious effects of Greek philosophy” (99) that “laid the foundations for . . . Roman Catholic interpretation.” (100)

The chapter on the eclipse of the gospel in the medieval church surveys, in 8 pages, hermeneutics from Augustine to Aquinas. The author’s assessment of this period is that hermeneutics was “seriously compromised” because it had become “so intertwined with unbiblical philosophical categories.” (108) For example, Goldsworthy is critical of Augustine’s use of the rule of faith in his exegetical work. He describes this as exegesis “controlled by already formulated doctrines” and as a way of subordinating the meaning of Scripture to the teaching authority of the church. (102) In a later chapter he returns to this theme, describing the rule of faith as a dogmatic framework that Scripture must fit into. (118) The author does not entertain the possibility that the rule of faith was not an arbitrary dogmatic formula foreign to the gospel, but rather emerged out of the gospel itself, as written, taught, and lived by the early Christians.

According to Goldsworthy, the eclipse of the gospel by the Roman Catholic Church is rooted in the nature/grace distinction, producing a body of dogma that is “aberrant” in content. “This dialectic allows for the synergism of cooperating grace that in turn leads to the whole structure of merits, invocation of saints, Mariology, purgatory and the upside-down relationship of justification and sanctification.” (118)

Subsequent chapters in Part II deal with the eclipse of the gospel in liberalism (the transcendent is lost in the immanent), philosophical hermeneutics (the loss of objective meaning in postmodern hermeneutical theorists), historical criticism (humanistic presuppositions in methodology), literary criticism (methods that focus on the text [structuralism] or the reader [reader-response] rather than the author), and evangelicalism (quietism, dispensationalism, legalism, subjectivism).

Part III is a reconstruction of evangelical hermeneutics. The opening chapter of this section is again a defense of Reformation theology as the

foundation for authentic hermeneutics. Calvin “demolishes” the Thomistic system of nature plus grace. (186) Calvin’s principle of the “internal witness of the Holy Spirit” is the authenticator of the authority of Scripture, not the Church or rational proofs (188). The perspicuity of Scripture assures one of avoiding “the totalitarianism of Rome.” (198). These and other “gospel” principles are strongly asserted as hermeneutical keys, though never demonstrated as such.

Goldsworthy does present some helpful and balanced suggestions for hermeneutics, particularly when he writes of the need to do hermeneutics in the context of biblical theology as a whole. The problem that *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* presents to the non-evangelical reader is the notion that principles widely agreed upon are somehow exclusively evangelical. For example, inspiration and unity of Scripture is a fundamental belief about the Bible held by Roman Catholics and Orthodox, not just evangelicals. Moreover, “The Hermeneutics of Christ,” the final chapter of the book, is not conterminous with Reformation foundations and presuppositions. In fact, ironically his model for understanding the hermeneutics of Christ, the unity/distinction of the two natures of Christ, is rooted in the formula of Chalcedon, not in the Reformation.

Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics will be praised by evangelicals but likely ignored by others.

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Reflection: Fear in the Midst of Sorrow

In recent weeks, since the passing of my mother, I find my spirit bouncing about. I find it difficult to attend, to land, and to settle in. I am now officially an orphan! And, I struggle to live into the meaning of that new status. Sometimes, I

feel fear as I look toward the future – fear from loss, fear of uncertainty, fear of aging. I do not think of myself as a fearful person, so this fear poses a challenge.

In the midst of my struggles, I am reminded of a question that I was grappling with in October just before Mother’s last journey began. A spiritual advisor had asked me if I could “stand at the door of what is with an open heart?” At the time, I thought I knew what the “what is” was, but now I’m not so sure.

Today, as I face the reality of my loss and the turbulent time of transition, I find myself reminding myself of a scripture that I have always found comforting

“Aren’t two sparrows sold for only a penny? Still, not one of them falls to the ground without God knowing it. Even the hairs of your head are all counted. So, don’t be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows.” Matthew 10: 29-30

That this scripture provides solace and hope may be obvious. But, let me elaborate just a bit on what I “hear” and “see” as I consider this scripture in light of my recent lived experience.

Do you know how many hairs are on your head? What about on the hairs of your son or daughter’s head? Another loved one? The love I feel for my son is beyond anything I could have imagined before he was born. I know him well; sometimes, from his perspective, perhaps too well. Yet, I could not begin to know how many hairs are on his head.

I am told that the average number of hairs is somewhere in the range of 450+ hairs per head. At 12 noon today – the day I am writing this – there were 6,654,377,888 people inhabiting planet earth. And, $450 \times 6,654,377,888$ equals...well...an astronomical number!

The above gospel passage tells us that God know how many hairs are on each of our heads – and, not only those, but the number of hairs, feathers, spines...on each and everyone of God’s other creatures. Can you imagine? If you’re like me, that number astounds – and God’s presence and attending to life are beyond my comprehension.

Yet, the story is not really told in the numbers. To have God know the number of hairs on my head means that God knows my every thought, my every fear, my every sorrow, and my every joy. No one – even those who know me well – will ever know me that well – AND love me for who I am.

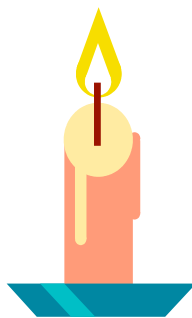
Think of it! God holds each of us in God's heart, we are each surrounded by God's personal love—you, me, and each of the 6,654,377,888+ people who inhabit earth. Now, that is an awesome thought to consider.

Does having God love and know us so mean that we will know only happiness, that only good things will happen to us, or that our lives will be without sorrow or suffering? No—though sometimes I think I would wish it—it does not. Look again at the scripture. Jesus does not say that God will keep the sparrow from falling; rather, he says that no sparrow will fall without God's knowledge.

No, God never promised that we would escape suffering. Just like the sparrows, we too will fall. All of us, at one time or another, will know sorrow. However, God does tell us that we will NEVER be alone! No matter how alone, distraught, or frightened we might feel, God is there—God's love for us is greater than anything that can happen to us. Life will hand us what life hands us—joy, tears, love, and sorrow; but God is there with us—laughing, crying, holding us close.

May we open our hearts to feel that presence, to feel that love. We have but to remember. We are loved—who are we to be afraid?

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The God Beneath the Rubble

Part VII

[Ed. Note: This is the seventh and final installment in a series drawn from a manuscript by the late Father John Hix, a priest of the diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri who died in 2001. Father Hix's entire manuscript has been reprinted in this newsletter with the permission of his nephew, Dr. Gerald Miller of the Rockhurst University faculty.]

THE SECOND ACCOUNT OF CREATION –

It is not Good that the Man Should be Alone

Genesis 2: 4b-25

... Yahweh God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being.

Yahweh God planted a garden in Eden which is in the east, and there he put the man he had fashioned. Yahweh God caused to spring up from the soil every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat, with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden. ... Yahweh God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and take care of it. Then Yahweh God gave the man this admonition, 'You may eat indeed of all the trees in the garden. Nevertheless of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat, for on the day you eat of it you shall most surely die.'

Yahweh God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate.' So from the soil Yahweh God fashioned all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name the man would give it. The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven and all the wild beasts. But no helpmate suitable for man was found for him. So Yahweh God made the man fall into a deep sleep. And while he slept, he took one of his ribs and enclosed it in flesh. Yahweh God built the rib he had taken from the man into the woman, and brought her to the man. The man exclaimed:

'This at last is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh! This is to be called woman, for this was taken from man.'

This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body.

Now both of them were naked, the man and his wife, but they felt no shame in front of each other.

For all the formal difference between the two stories of creation, there is a remarkable identity of spirit. In this second account, the human species, in its male representative, is not last to appear within the earthly setting, as the perfective component to which all else has pointed. Rather, as soon as there is ground on which to stand, he is made and set on his feet. Dirt assumes a human shape as Yahweh molds it, and humanity begins as God then provides the breath of life. The story evidently has its origins outside the homebred traditions of a shepherd people, for the man is a farmer, and his livelihood explains the now inverse order in which the various creatures come to be--the sense and purpose of a farm are seen, not in the ground itself, but in the one who tills the soil, sows the seed, tends and harvests.

After the man has been created and taken his place on earth, the various plants, shrubs and trees appear on the land, now irrigated by life-bearing rivers. It is all so wondrous and beautiful: a botanical garden of countless species, each seemingly striving to attain a uniqueness of form and color with which to draw admiring attention; individual plants hungrily consuming nutrients, eager for growth and propagation; all vegetation straining heavenward to close the distance between itself and the stimulating warmth of light. All of this is entrusted to the loving care of the man, the gardener, and given over for his appreciation and use--*enticing to look at and good to eat* [Genesis 2: 9]. And yet, beyond the man's complete understanding, something within him dims his total appreciation of all this exterior beauty and denies him full contentment. Even though earthly sovereign of a delightful paradise, *he is guiltily unhappy*.

Yahweh observes his creature's condition and identifies the deficiency which is its cause: *It is not good that the man should be alone* [Genesis 2: 18]. The Lord then sets Himself to the production of an immense assortment of animate beings, bringing each to the man that he might assert earthly command by naming, and thereby, definitively declaring its nature. The man now directs a zoological garden as well as a botanical one; a most amazing collection. Observing the enormously diverse body types, manners of locomotion, food and lodging preferences, the man stands in awe. Seeing the unique characteristics each creature presents, he experiences thrill, fascination, amusement and reverential respect. He is the keeper and master of them all.

Still he feels a deep, unfulfilled longing. He realizes that each encounter with other than himself has not satisfied his yearning. He has been seeking something more in response to an insuppressible want; looking for what will bring wholeness. But he has encountered all that is to be found, and that which fulfills his profound need is simply not there. With all that exists in the world at his command and service, surely he should be content, but he is not. As it is, he feels doomed to perpetual incompleteness--when he lies down to rest, at the end of his first day of life, tears moisten the man's cheeks.

But during the night something of himself--humanness--is collected from him, augmented and modeled into the feminine. Alive now, she awakens the unfulfilled source of her shared nature with a gentle tap on his shoulder, smiling as she whispers softly: *Wake up! Wake up! I am the one you were seeking, and I am here.* When the man opens his eyes, he is looking into hers and seeing, miraculously, what he has so longed for without even being able to completely express it, the light of understanding that will make possible their being truly together. *This at last--these few hours preceding must have seemed an eternity--is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh!* [Genesis 2: 23] Here, finally, is life that understands him: one with whom to exchange knowing glances, to share the joy of conscious experience of beauty, to be joined in dreams and undertakings. No more the frustration of living in a place of human isolation; the energy-draining sadness of being alone in an uncomprehending world.

This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they became one body [Genesis 2: 24]. Clearly, it was not just any sort of companionship that the man, in his profound incompleteness, desired. He was not merely longing to live as an individual in a group setting of mutual goodwill and peace. Nor was his deep need capable of being fully satisfied by friends and acquaintances with whom to share work or common interests. No, the yearning of his core humanness was for a depth and range of intimacy possible only in a special, absolute and permanent joining of one to another--a life-sharing and loving companionship for the duration of existence.

Furthermore, the second chapter of Genesis can be instructively reflected upon through an exercise of imagination, that considers advantages and disadvantages of other possibilities, known as *What if... ? What if* the world was not as we find it, but otherwise? *What if* the initial human, who first stood in the midst of creation, was the only member of our species?

What if one could act alone and it was not necessary to deal with others? How would life be more content, less troublesome? A person would be free to think of oneself, not having to bother with what someone else wants or finds offensive. When choosing how time might be allocated, what should be done and in which order, one would be at liberty to act without needing to consult. There would be no unpleasant arguments, no stinging sarcasm, no constant and unreasonable expectations and demands by others. One would not be obliged to suppress comment struggling mightily to break free and be given voice in reaction to someone else's annoying ways. There would be no lies, no broken promises, no treachery. One would not have to endure persistent pleas to act against one's own better judgment, to tolerate disapproving looks or bear the draining disappointment caused by what another does or fails to do.

Both authors and hearers of Genesis were well aware of commonly-stated advantages attributable to the totally solitary life. Yet, on balance, at the conclusion of their *What if...*, their judgment--the sole part of their thinking deemed worthy of posterity--was that the disadvantages of complete solitude far outweigh any benefits ascribed to it. Humans do not want to be always alone. We need someone with whom to talk: for all the difficulty and ensuing heartache, we simply must talk if we are to be ourselves and attain happiness. Whatever reluctance we feel at the prospect of self-disclosure having other than the desired outcome, we do want to be known and loved, to be assured of our desirability, the worth of our existence. In spite of all of life pressing in on us from every side, we can be together with another, can be uniquely known and loved, only by our souls touching each other, by revealing our innermost minds and hearts, truly communicating. Those who protest that they prefer solitude and silence are masking their own intolerable, internal frustration of feeling that true personal companionship is unattainable.

Each hungers inside for another with whom to laugh--the major delight of humor arises from sharing--and, as need be, with whom to cry, so that suffering may be eased by the counsel and commiseration. The absence of another would preclude our calling attention--*Look!*--to the beauty we contemplate, to the music--*Listen!*-- we hear. There would be no one to whom to turn to in the presence of the awe-inspiring. Alone, one could not bask in the glow of another's approving smile. There would be no one to whom to sing our song, to tell our story, to recite our poem, to show our handiwork. No one to groan in sympathy as the hammer strikes thumb, not nail. From whom would we seek a second opinion about some thought, some plan? To whom could we say: *How do I look?*

Much of our natural being is directed outward: we become the person we are creatively destined to be by taking within from beyond ourselves, valuing what is other, and then acting in contributive harmony with what is now part of us. Through the other, and through ourselves cooperating with the other, we are led to a clearer and deeper sense of our original purpose. It is by knowing and caring, helping and being of service, healing and comforting, that we grow into a more profound awareness of the good of which we are capable.

What if it were otherwise? Some typically human qualities, such as courage and persistence, would nonetheless still be possible in complete isolation, although lesser in meaning and value. There might be laudable self-love, born of marvel at one's given being, though it is difficult to conceive of it as having great import. But most virtues simply would not have a meaningful opportunity for expression; virtues such as generosity, considerate inclusion of another, truthfulness, fidelity or justice.

A sole occupant of the world could not know the true joy of freely giving what might have been withheld. The solitary human world would lack full definition, completion; that is, could not be someone, for there would be no one to whom to be someone to. An indispensable part of our sacredly-implanted identity consists in what we are to another.

In themselves, the stars would be as bright, the breeze as refreshing, the animal and vegetable kingdoms as fascinating, as in a universe inhabited by billions, but that solitary individual's core emptiness would steal from their luster, their wonder, their ability to thrill. *What if* there was really only one? It would be incredibly wasteful and unbelievably sad.

Another question, secondary perhaps, but not lacking insightfulness, naturally suggests itself as we review the second account of creation: what could have been the origin of the notion of a world inhabited by a single human being? Authors of Genesis, along with conveyors and hearers of the story, had never known such an earthly period and had received no such traditions based on the recollection of distant times past. The life these ancients experienced, in its principal features, was very much the same as our own today. Yes, they had no airplanes, television, nuclear power, computers or cell phones, but these are not the defining stuff of human life.

The people of Genesis lived in communities, towns and villages. A child was born, to the delight of parents and relatives, prompting the congratulations of neighbors. [The naming process was different, but hardly inferior. A comment would be made by one of the principals or a bystander as the child came forth. It might have to do with some simultaneous occurrence, a storm, perhaps; with something the child seemed to be doing, clenching the hand, for example; or, more likely, it might be a prediction, prayer or both. So the child might be named: *child of thunder*; or *grasper*; or *may God smile*. Such names are scriptural.] The child grew, just as they do now, bringing pride and pleasure by the first step, the first word. Falls, cuts and bruises occasioned efforts to comfort. There was sickness and accompanying anxiety, play--and disputes--with other children, the need to learn, the requirement to help with chores. There was the awakening of awareness about the differences between male and female, there was adolescent fascination. Young adulthood meant a full share of the workload and, possibly, a wedding. New generations of children were born, celebrated and nurtured. Sometimes good fortune, sometimes setback. Inevitably aging began to take its toll, but children married and the joys of grandparenthood followed. All along the way there was music and dancing, joys and sorrows, stories and friendships, arguments and difficulties. Then the final earthly chapter was written and death claimed another. It was quite the same as lives in our time.

How, then, did it occur to someone; this story about a man all alone in the world except for earth, plants and animals?

In the early evening, a man passes outward through the gates in the wall--in view of its flimsiness, it might be more accurately termed a fence--which encloses a small farming village, his home. It's twilight and all the workers have returned from their day's work outside the wall. He had come back with them, but then remembered the cloak he had shed in the midday heat and forgotten about, a covering he would certainly need overnight to shield him from the cold air. Arriving at the small mound where he had left the garment, he decides to sit quietly for a time before returning to the safety of the village. He looks out at the fields of grain, surveys the trees, and observes the distant animals beginning to roam in search of prey during the dark hours which now approach. Viewing his surroundings, he ponders: *What if* this was all? *What if* it was just me only and all of this? He continued to consider such thoughts as he walked home in darkness.

He was married--the marriage was a reasonably happy one--and he and his wife were parents of two young children. One night, adhering to a well-established family ritual, he welcomed, if somewhat distractedly, each child's *I love you* and *Good Night* hug and kiss, as his wife and he tucked the young ones in for the evening. Later, he and his spouse gave each other a customary kiss as they retired for the night.

This night, which had begun so routinely, was not to end so, however, for in the very early hours of the morning the man had a nightmare. In the dream, he awakened while it was still quite dark and reflexively reached toward his left to where his wife lay, but his hand touched bedding and nothing more. He strained to open his eyes and focus through the scarcity of light on where she should be; she was not there; her side of the bed was empty. This is strange, he thought, especially in view of the time--an hour or so of sleep was still left to them. His still-sleepy mind tried to make sense of it. She must have heard some sound from the children's room--the same sound, undoubtedly, which awakened him, although without his clear awareness--and had gone to investigate. He waited a short time for her return, but she did not; nor was there any sound from the children's room. Worried, he lifted himself from the bed and went to find his family.

No one was there. The children's beds were empty and there was no sign of any of them. Surely there was a simple, safe explanation, and yet the man felt a wave of sickening uneasiness. He experienced a feeling of relief, however, when the obvious came to him--she had taken the children to the kitchen, where she was, at this very moment, making early preparations for breakfast. The man calmly made his way to the kitchen area, knowing that his wife and children would be there. But they were not. His heart began to race and he felt the

perspiration forming on forehead and temples, and on his hands, as he looked throughout the house--it was not large--in search of his family. They were not there.

Maybe she had gone with the children to the closest neighbor's home; it was the sole remaining possibility. But for what purpose? And at this hour? He walked quickly across the way to the neighbor's front door. There was a hint of morning light now, but it was still quite early and people had not yet emerged from homes to address the business of the day. He rapped lightly on the door. No one answered. He would just have to knock more loudly. He did so, but to no effect. The third time he pounded on the door. Complete panic had set in now. While ordinarily he would never have done such a thing, this was an exceptional case and he had no option--he entered the house and moved from room to room, first calling softly, then shouting, pleading for a response, any sound of life. But his wife and children were not there, nobody was there, the house was empty. He ran outside, to the next home, not bothering this time with the niceties of politeness, pounding on the door and hardly waiting for an answer before entering, uninvited, to again find no one.

Had he gone insane? The sun was up now. Domestic animals roamed the small village and birds had taken to early morning flight. But there was no being to be seen. He ran from one end of the village to the other, shouting frantically: *Somebody answer me! Where are you? Please tell me what's going on.* But there was no response. It was as though everyone had gone away during the night. They had all disappeared; he alone was left.

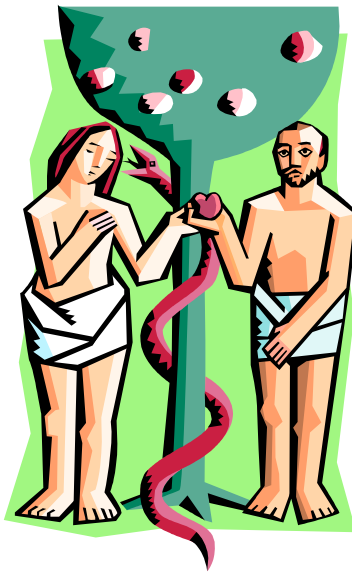
Suddenly, he felt her hand on his shoulder. He heard his wife asking as she did so: *Are you all right? Were you having a bad dream?* He just looked at her, his heart was still pounding. He did not answer her questions; instead he asked her, with genuine concern: *How are you?* Somewhat amused, she smiled and responded: *I slept well.* Still deeply agitated, he asked: *And how are the children?* He could not cloak the anxiety which puzzled her. *They're just fine. They're asleep.* But he had to see for himself. He had been staring at her as though taking his eyes from her would allow her to be spirited away again. As he went to the children's room, he kept looking back at her. He looked intently at one child, then the other, then his wife, before kissing each of the young ones tenderly on the forehead.

That morning at breakfast, he had no appetite; he kept looking at his wife and would not let her leave his sight. As he prepared to leave for work, he embraced and kissed her as he had not done in years--or ever. Looking back toward her every few steps as he realized that his behavior raised questions--until he could no longer see her.

When evening came, he returned from work at a trot, bringing with him a bouquet of flowers he had gathered on the way. Once again, on entering the house, his embrace and kiss possessed warmth previously unknown, and he lavished affection on the children. He was thoroughly attentive as he listened to their chatter; it was obvious that he was immensely enjoying his family. His wife, for her part, could only wonder what might have happened. *I don't know what's come over this man*, she thought, *but thank you, Lord.*

Father John Hix +RIP

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Praise Him

(At Saint Joseph's Trappist Abbey)

The moon-faced tower
behind me scraped the dull sky.
I walked up the hill

through old snow still white,
iced, dusk-gleaming, over swift-
snagged gun-blue river,

on cracked macadam,
to pale sun sliding behind
low stone arches, bell
tower, chapel. Ostracized
behind visitors wall, old

pilgrim lost in a
thicket, motherless child, I
closed my eyes against

the dark. Above me,
one electric light and the
thought - "Keep to your path:

love whom I send you.
Write what I tell you. Dance what
I show you. Thank me."

*Patricia Cleary Miller, Ph.D.
Professor, Department of English*



Thomas More Center News

Recently Purchased Books

The following books have been recently purchased by the Thomas More Center and are (or soon will be) available for check-out in the Rockhurst University Greenlease Library -

Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Harper-Collins Spiritual Classics, 2004)

- Don Brophy, *One Hundred Great Catholic Books: From the Early Centuries to the Present* (Blackbridge, 2007)
- Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation: A History* (Modern Library, 2006)
- Marion Crowe, *Aiming at Heaven, Getting the Earth: The English Catholic Novel Today* (Lexington Books, 2007)
- Brian Doyle, ed., *The Best Catholic Writing 2007* (Loyola Press, 2007)
- Eamon Duffy, *The Creed in the Catechism: The Life of God for Us* (Continuum, 1996)
- Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life* (Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Kaspar von Greyerz, *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford University Press, 2008)
- N. John Hall, *Belief: A Memoir* (Frederic C. Beil, 2007)
- Craig Harline, ed., *The Burdens of Sister Margaret: Inside a Seventeenth-Century Convent*, abridged edition (Yale University Press, 2000)
- Deal W. Hudson, *Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Political Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States* (Threshold Editions, 2008)
- Preston Jones, ed., *Is Belief in God Good, Bad or Irrelevant? A Professor and a Punk Rocker Discuss Science, Religion, Naturalism and Christianity* (Intervarsity Press Books, 2006)
- Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Chenu to Ratzinger* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2007)
- Lauro Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici* (Oxford University Press, 2004)
- Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for the Soul of Renaissance Florence* (Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Bernard McGinn, ed., *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (Modern Library, 2006)
- Robert S. Miola, ed., *Early Modern Catholicism: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Oxford University Press, 2007)
- David O'Connell, *Furl That Banner: The Life of Abram J. Ryan, Poet-Priest of the South* (Mercer University Press, 2006)
- Douglas J. Slawson, *Ambition and Arrogance: Cardinal William O'Connell of Boston and the American Catholic Church* (Cobalt Productions, 2007)
- Roderick Strange, *John Henry Newman* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008)
- John Stubbs, *John Donne: The Reformed Soul, A Biography* (W.W. Norton, 2007)

Next Issue

In the next issue of *Dimensions*, look for a review of the March 4, 2008 public lecture presented by Father Jan Michael Joncas at Rockhurst University. Father Joncas, a well-known liturgical composer and theologian at the University

of St. Thomas (MN), offered comments on the topic, "The State of American Catholic Liturgical Music in the 21st Century." Father Joncas also led a well-attended workshop for area liturgists and pastoral musicians on the Rockhurst campus the day after his public lecture.

on behalf of the Thomas more center for the study of catholic
thought & culture,

best wishes
for a

happy and holy easter season!

