

# Verbum

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## Full Issue

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## Full Issue

### Abstract

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# VERBUM

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St. John Fisher College  
Religious Studies Department Club

Spring 2006

# Verbum 2006

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## Volume 3, Issue 2

**Editor** Rest Club

**Layout** Courtney Ren

### **Submission Review Committee**

Dr. Rev. Bill Graf,  
Colacino, Dr. Jane Hicks,

Dr. Rev. John  
Dr. Linda MacCammon  
Rev. Lee Chase,

### **Alumni Advisors**

Jodi Rowland, Class of 2004

Youth Minister at Holy Trinity, Webster

Jonathan Schott, Class of 2002

Coordinator of Faith Formation at Church of the Transfiguration, Pittsford, NY

### **Faculty Advisor**

Dr. Rev. Michael Costanzo

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# Letter from the Editor

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For the last time, I am writing to introduce yet another edition of *Verbum*. Although my journey as REST Club President has had some rough points, I have always enjoyed having the opportunity to share a variety of great writings from the entire St. John Fisher community. This semester is no different. I feel that we have some of the best writings ever submitted. I assure you that this edition will provide a pleasurable reading to anyone who seeks intellectual stimulation.

As always, I would like to take the time to thank all of the people who have made this edition of *Verbum*, as well as many others, possible. First, recognition goes to the submission review committee and the officers of the Religious Studies Club who, along with reading the submissions, encouraged students from the community to submit their work. Secondly, I would also like to credit the people who chose to submit their writing. Regardless of whether their piece was chosen or not, it is their effort and devotion to religious topics that make a publication like *Verbum* available to the community.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy *my* final edition of *Verbum*. It has been a wonderful experience for me to work with such talented people. I can safely say and promise that you can look forward to a publication that will continue to improve with every new issue.

Sincerely,

Matthew Cotugno  
*Religious Studies Club* President

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## **Alumni Corner**



**Contributions from the Department of Religious Studies Alumni**

## Roman Catholic Sacramental Preparation: For Kids Only?

By: Jonathan Schott

In Roman Catholic parishes throughout not only the Diocese of Rochester, New York, but also around the United States and Canada, parish-based catechetical formation in preparation for sacramental celebration is losing ground in favor of the family-based model, where the parents fulfill their roles as the primary educators of their children.<sup>1</sup>

The question however, is how adequately prepared are the parents themselves in providing a strong and solid sacramental preparation? Are we, as Catholic education ministers, providing the parents of our children with necessary catechesis and tools to fully integrate and develop our young people to participate in what are known as the “master works” of God?<sup>2</sup>

For the most part, the answer is no. Time and time again those of us who fill ministerial roles as “master catechists” or catechetical leaders run into problems of parents not assuming the role of the primary educator of their children during sacramental preparation. Whether the reason be that the parents do not feel adequate theologically to assume this leadership role, or be it that parents simply are not active in their faith - the “Easter, Christmas, and Communion” Catholics, - there is nonetheless a breakdown in parents’ ability to “teach the faith” to their children, especially during sacramental catechesis.

What are the reasons for this breakdown? I note three specific reasons here. First, some parents simply do not know what “catechesis” means. For some, it means dropping their children off for parish-based formation classes once a week or sending their children to a Children’s Liturgy of the Word or its equivalent on Sunday during Mass. The unfortunate

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, “Guidelines for Sacramental Preparation,” p. 25; cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2225-2227.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Luke 5:17; 6:19; 8:46.

result of the “drop off model” is that it separates parents and children from forming their faith together. This dichotomy is particularly noticeable in parishes that embrace the classroom model of formal Children’s Christian Formation but embrace a model of family home-based sacramental catechesis.

Secondly, in some of these cases, a lack of knowing what catechesis is may be the result of some misinformation. For example, parents who bring their children to religion class once a week may assume that these children will be catechized for sacramental preparation when in actuality they are not. Also, parents might not be adequately informed of what the Church teaches in this regard, specifically, that they are responsible in the sacramental catechesis of their children. As the National Catechetical Directory states,

“Parents have a right and duty to be intimately involved in preparing their children for [the Sacraments.] Catechesis aims to help parents grow in their understanding and appreciation of [the Sacraments] and participate readily in the catechizing of their children.”<sup>3</sup>

Third, persons who in roles at the parish level in terms of Catechetical Leader or Director of Religious Education have not been active enough in their models for sacramental catechesis in promoting parental involvement and parental guidance in children’s sacramental preparation. This may be a result of the “old guard” who grew up in the Catholic school system before Vatican II or simply catechetical leaders who too zealously and wrongly take on the responsibility of catechizing children for the sacraments.

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<sup>3</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States*, “Sharing the Light of Faith,” Washington, D.C., 1979, #121.

What is the solution to this problem? Can we require that all parents, if they utilize the parish-based religious education model, must in turn serve as a volunteer catechist so that they may be more directly involved in their children's catechesis? Do we send out the parents of those children who are dismissed for Children's Liturgy of the Word so that our already scarcely populated pews are even emptier? Or, do we take a new approach to our sacramental catechesis, empowering parents, informing parents, and enabling parents to work alongside their children as they prepare to celebrate in God's great gifts of grace. This option is the future of sacramental catechesis for children: family faith formation focusing on catechesis, evangelization, worship, and our Catholic life. But how do we accomplish this goal?

I think a very good platform to develop this way of thought and action is to embed a parental sacrament preparation module into an existing structure and timeline for parish sacramental celebrations. Most parishes already require parent information meetings, perhaps a retreat, an activity day, Mass attendance, and so on. But none of these options function in their fullest capacity if the parents are simply "going through the motions of what must be done" for their child to celebrate a sacrament while all throughout these meetings, retreats, and so on parents are actually thinking more about the family party after little Joey makes his First Eucharist. We as the catechetical leaders do not have the responsibility to prepare children for the sacraments; we have the responsibility to *empower families* to prepare for the sacraments *together*.

I mentioned above four ways in which families can learn more and experience more in order for them to be empowered in their sacramental catechesis. These four "pillars" are absolutely critical if we are to succeed in our role of re/in/forming our parish families during

sacramental preparation.<sup>4</sup>

First, we must be clear on what catechesis is. A segment of the parental preparation module should be devoted to understanding the nature and goal of catechesis, and be more aware that catechesis is not, to put it very simply, “teaching.”

Secondly, we need to refocus our efforts to include a move toward evangelization. When we speak to parents about evangelization, we are speaking about conversion, about a deepening of our faith alongside our children; growing deeper in our relationship to God through an experience of conversion in sacramental preparation.

Third, we must reiterate again and again that our sacramental celebrations fall directly in line with our worship celebrations. Sacraments happen during liturgy. Attendance and participation in parish liturgies is a keystone to developing a sense of conversion and a sense of association with God.

Finally, we must empower the parents of our children to know that sacraments are for life. Celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist should happen over the course of one’s earthly existence; from womb to tomb. Furthermore, the sacraments give us life. We are participating in Christ when we prepare for and celebrate a sacrament. We spiritually and physically bond with Christ in our sacramental celebrations; in the sacraments we get life. Yet most importantly, when we do things “in memory of me,” there is a spiritual drive and desire inside each one of us to be welcomed into Christ’s presence at the time our death. Through our love and adoration of the sacraments, we hope for the greatest glory of all: eternal life in

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<sup>4</sup> I use the spelling of the word re/in/forming here for specific reasons. One, I contend that parents may have been misinformed about what catechesis is and their responsibilities, therefore they must be *re-informed*. Secondly, we are bringing a fresh approach to the models for sacramental preparation, therefore we are *informing* our participants in a new way, which will lead to a deepening of our faith as a whole, therefore we are *forming* our faith as Catholics.

Christ Jesus.

This model for family sacramental formation may not be the best model developed, it may very well be a trial case that is unsuccessful when put into practice. My hope, however, is that we as Catholics can grow together in a deeper understanding of our sacramental and spiritual lives by coming together with parents and children during their very special time in preparing for a sacrament. And even if we only reach one family, one small family in a sea of others, then we are beginning to transform and inspire.

# Brief Essays



\*\*\* Prize for *Brief Essay* provided by



- Brief Essays reviewed by St. John Fisher College Alumni Jodi Rowland and Jonathan Schott

## MARRIAGE: A Broken Image?

By: Jeffrey Frate

“No life is creative except to the degree that it is consecrated... To refuse to give my life in some extreme circumstances would be, not to preserve it, but to mutilate it. It is as though sacrifice were its very fulfillment, as though to lose it were the means of saving it.”

(Gabriel Marcel)

“Husbands lay down your life for your wives, just as Christ laid down his life for the church.”

(St. Paul)

I am to sacrifice for her all that I am, but if only for her, then I will lie before her dead, and she before me (as in Romeo and Juliet). I cannot give all that I am because our bodies get in the way, the medium and frustration of our union. I cannot unzip myself from my skin; my bones give the underlying form through which I am known. If I lay my life down solely for her, she cannot help me to rise, and I cannot take it up again.

The union of marriage is a broken image, not fallen or corrupt, but unsatisfied; a union of two bodies, which impede the oneness of the souls; I am, and she is; like reaching out to touch the hem of Christ's robe, I reach out in fear, harboring the thought of condemnation.

Is there a union of consciousness? Could I be fully present to her in mind? It seems hopeless, because my mind is barely one with itself, it is polyvalent; a succession of events without any eternal present; all I can offer her is fragments; ashes of then and burning now.

Unity is unconditional love, eternal presence; it is a way of being that has so little to do with time; it is to lay life down in the flames of martyrdom, to be a holocaust indefinitely; but for whom? Only for the One who could give my life back again; or else love is only suicide.

Sacrifice is to God alone; if I am to lay my life down for my wife, Christ must be there, in her, to give me my life back again from the dead.



# Poetry Bend



\*\*\* Prize provided by



- Poems reviewed by: REST Club Officers

*The Value of Suffering*

In a station, Grand Central  
I was hurtin' to escape my ache  
a railway rendezvous  
away from You.  
My soul - in real bad shape.

Well little did I know  
my train had broken down  
wrecked - just like my life.  
Just then the Engineer  
Decided to appear  
And he offered this advice.

He said: Hop on board the pain train.  
Sure it hurts, but not like hell.  
Ride on with Jesus,  
He'll make you well, boy  
Soon it'll be pain, plus pure joy.

What do you mean, joy  
I asked him in a rage.  
I've tried booze and women  
And needles too  
Cuz suffering is something I just can't do.

And now you say,  
Ride some train  
Towards the pain  
I asked him, what good can that be?  
Does God want to hurt me?  
He said: Hop on board the pain train.  
Sure it hurts, but not like hell.  
Ride on with Jesus,  
He'll make you well, boy  
Soon it'll be pain, plus pure joy.

Then I saw the Lord  
He climbed on in,  
And shouted "All aboard!"  
And I hopped on, too.  
The pain's not so bad  
With Jesus sitting next to you.

## **Hands of God**

A group of students  
Make their way, south,  
To be the heart  
Hands and mouth,  
Of God.

Many people speak  
About the word;  
Many people talk  
About knowin' the Lord,  
Our God.

A few rare, though,  
Put words to deeds,  
For few want to  
Live a life that leads  
To God.

The students toil,  
In mud and rocks  
And often complain,  
About dirty socks.  
All for God.

They like to do good  
For those less able,  
Those less fortunate.  
And need to be stable,  
For God.

To be the hands of God  
Is what they must be,  
To help all the world  
See....  
The love of God.

Research



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# You Can't Believe The Joy!

## A Biological and Theological View of Suffering

By: Justin Miller

### ***I. Introduction***

“Consider it pure joy whenever you go through any sort of trial. Realize that when your faith is tested this makes for endurance. Let endurance come to its perfection so that you may be fully mature and lacking in nothing.” (Jam 1: 2-4). The Book of James speaks tough words that seem the opposite of our societal notions concerning suffering. At first, such a claim seems outrageous, not grounded in reality, and provides no real solace to those suffering. It leads one to question: why must human beings suffer, did not Jesus suffer once and for all? Humankind has asked such questions when it comes to the nature of suffering. The Hebrew nation guided by Yahweh formed the theological foundation for Christians to follow, but were unable to answer these questions. Theologians across the centuries have argued back and forth over the nature, value, and mystery of suffering. Modern theologians attempt to repress the very value of suffering. Similarly, American culture seems set on repressing all suffering and pain, whether psychological or physical. While some modern scientists cite the value of human suffering, others are far more seemingly on a quest to eradicate it. The historical Catholic perspective - yielding such devotions as the *Mater Dolorosa*, the *Holy Wounds of Jesus*, and the *Sorrowful Mysteries* - is no coincidence, for suffering is part of God's plan for humanity. Only by looking at biological and theological models that seek to understand and value suffering can one see it as a God-given gift that leads to pure joy.

Fr. John Corapi speaks of the value of suffering. After an Augustine-like reversion to the faith from a life of materialism and drug addiction, he and a fellow seminarian underwent many hardships during their first year of major seminary at the Vatican. For Corapi, it was chronic migraines. It was far worse for his critically ill friend, and both missed more classes than they could attend. Corapi felt himself asking God why this was happening, why bring him to study in Rome only to leave him and his friend bedridden? Their pains grew progressively worse, and within a few months, his friend was near death. Corapi witnessed his friend's final moments after the latter had received the Anointing of the Sick at a hospital. From his deathbed, this seminarian struggling painfully, waved Corapi over, and whispered into his ear, "You can't believe the joy!" as his last words before he died. Were they not in Vatican City, one might presume such a statement would have shocked any physician in the hospital room. Yet, recent scientific study has become re-interested in some degree of human suffering. Thus, one must begin with science, specifically Biology, to begin to ascertain the value of human suffering and God's plan for it.

## ***II. Biological Perspectives on Suffering***

Humans enter the world after their mothers' excruciating toil through labor. Newborn babies' first contact with the outside world will generally come in the form of a slap from the doctor and they begin cry. Thus begins the human life cycle and aptly, pain and suffering occur at the onset. This will continue throughout a human's life as one ages and later dies. C.S. Lewis calls pain the "unmasked, unmistakable evil; every man knows that something is wrong when he is being hurt" (Lewis, 92). Yet, Lewis later goes on to prove that the necessary "evil" of suffering can always bring a greater good, because God can use this "wrong" to make humans "right" (Lewis, 92). The same is true in science where the model of suffering has great long-term benefits.

Humans have evolved to their current state only through great suffering almost as if there is some larger plan for suffering. This suffering is central to the theories of Charles Darwin and is logically self-evident (Rolston,133). Suffering is as fundamental to Biology as an organism's life and death, and just as important. Because the concepts of "suffering" and "struggle" are losing importance in many Biology textbooks, Holmes Rolston devoted a chapter of his text Science and Religion: A Critical Survey to the biological value of suffering. He asserts life struggles sustain one's life and lead one to greater things; sufferings are actually "a blessing in disguise" (Rolston, 134). Although science may not value suffering as a "blessing," one cannot deny its benefit to life forms in nature. He puts it best when he states,

Every life is an unceasing adventure in endowment and risk, and all organic being is constituted - to employ a scientific metaphor - in a mixture of environmental conductance and resistance, where the world is both a resource *and* threat. To adapt the Psalmist's religious metaphor, life is lived in green pastures *and* in the valley of the shadow of death, nourished by eating at a table prepared in the midst of its enemies. Struggle is a driving motif, but then again, its product is life forms selected for maxim adaptation to their environmental niches, and the harmony that comes out of the struggle quite as impressive as the struggle. (Rolston, 137)

Rolston echoes Lewis when he proves that it is only through this struggle that the ecosystem "writes straight" with the "crooked lines" that are Earth's life forms (Rolston, 137).

By looking at certain organisms as models of suffering, Biology proves the value of suffering. Rolston establishes this point by looking at the biological "macrolevel," when he explains the interactions of sibling pelican chicks (Rolston,137). These birds are not biologically suited for walking and often live in some of the most remote environments (Rolston, 138). Further, pelican parents are often very violent toward their offspring, are easily distracted, and leave one quarter of "nests abandoned often for no obvious cause" (Rolston, 138). Amidst all this, science discovers further suffering, because the dominant pelican chick seems to have an unbridled instinct for "fratricide" (Rolston, 139). At first,

one is unable to make sense of this cycle of suffering pelicans; yet several biological reasons necessitate such a life. Each “runt” is a needed sacrifice to increase the food intake and wellbeing of the dominant chick; thus, the “runt’s” suffering - however saddening - is crucial for the continuation of the life. Both pelicans would not have nearly the potential for survival as the dominant one alone. However, he notes that such a life is not characteristic of a creature made in the image of God (Rolston, 140).

In addition, science demonstrates that suffering is necessary for the future evolution and continuation of human life. On a molecular level, a look at the genetic disease Sickle Cell Anemia, wherein a defective hemoglobin molecule cannot transport oxygen, proves the scientific and genetic value of suffering (Rolston, 140). Providentially, the gene safeguards its carriers - more than 15% of the African population, depending on the region - against Malaria (Rolston, 140). Both Malaria and Sickle Cell Anemia can be deadly and claim lives at an early age. Malaria, however, has only been a problem as of late, seemingly with a change in African populations from small nomadic tribes to settled larger-scale farmers (Rolston, 141). Still, the hemoglobin deformation has survived through the blood-lines of many Africans. Studies as of 1987 suggest that the evolution of the hemoglobin molecule is working towards an optimal balance between anemia and malaria to increase the survival rate of the population (Rolston, 141). Overall, the struggle against anemia is necessary for most to farm collectively and be resistant to malaria. As biology shows in Sickle Cell Anemia and pelicans, life is a “passion play,” a grand tragedy where a sacrificial individual will start the chain reaction to allow the survival of all (Rolston, 141).

This parallel to Christ is surely no coincidence.

Yet, human suffering is often quite a different story. As the only creatures with intellect, we seek both to express our displeasure with suffering and to alleviate it through innovation. No physician would refuse to operate for the sake of not afflicting

the patient with a degree of pain because temporary suffering is necessary for the greater good of the patient. Instead, medicine has spent billions of dollars and man-hours creating new drugs to alleviate pain. Major hospitals are now “viewing chronic pain as a disease and creat[ing] pain teams to counteract the stifling pangs of discomfort” (Sandeep, 6).

This begs the question, how is the so-called disease of chronic pain any different from the disease Sickle Cell Anemia? For science, it appears there are two irreconcilable modes of suffering, wherein (1) an individual’s chronic pain is meaningless suffering unless it contributes to (2) the evolutionary process of humanity. Thus, mainstream science and medicine value suffering only to a certain extent. One can imagine any physician or nurse bursting into laughter if a patient refused anesthesia or pain relievers before an operation claiming, “No thank you, I consider it pure joy to suffer.” Yet, by looking at suffering from a theological perspective, one can see how such a revolutionary notion is possible: Christians must embrace suffering to understand the mysterious quality and joy of the Cross they carry along with Christ.

### ***III. Theological Perspectives on Suffering***

The foundation of theology, the Jewish Tradition, is unable to come to a clear understanding or value for suffering within God’s plan for humanity. In Deuteronomy 11:10, the Lord tells Israel his plan or model: if it keeps the Lord’s commands, He will grant them a blessed land with all they desire. Only if they are lured away from God, “serv[ing] other gods and worship[ing] them,” will suffering come upon them (Dt. 11:17). Yet, this notion of the reason for suffering goes against the book of Job wherein Job is an upright man who undergoes many trials, although he holds no false gods and has no grave sins. One might see a potential contradiction in these two depictions. The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes notes such a contradiction and thus seems to refute the idea of a God’s higher plan for humanity and suffering. He argues that there is no plan -

just God. This was the worldview of the leading Jewish scholars until the work of one revolutionary - Jesus Christ.

John's Gospel says Jesus was in Divine spiritual existence from even before the beginning of the universe, as "the Word [was] and the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1). The original Greek intended meaning for "Word" represents the concept of "idea, intent, or *plan*." Thus, the plan of God is clearly evident and eternal. Yet God's instrument to enact the plan entered time and came to earth only at the moment of the Incarnation, when "the Word became flesh" (Jn. 1:14). Within the next 33 years Jesus would be the catalyst in a revolution of the theological view of suffering. God's primary plan for sending Jesus to earth was to teach, minister, and suffer in order to redeem humans from sin. The climax of his earthly life is also the point of his greatest humility and suffering. In Christ's Passion, we see the extent of the passionate love God has for humanity. Only after this extreme suffering can God reveal the true joy that is the Resurrection. This is the ultimate model of suffering, the Cruciform. A much better model for human suffering than the pelican chick or malaria sufferers, the Cruciform is God's overarching plan for humanity. We must all die with Christ - the trials of each day adding up, bringing us closer and closer to Calvary - a share in his suffering so that we can share in his resurrection and eternal joy.

God uses pain to bring pure joy. While Jesus came to comfort the afflicted, he also came to afflict the comfortable. If a human becomes too comfortable in life, it is generally an indication of a lack of growth and thus a lack of suffering. One can note this in the statement, "...pain as God's megaphone is a terrible instrument [...] but it gives the only opportunity the bad man can have for amendment. It removes the veil; it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebellious soul" (Lewis, 95). Whether it be physical or emotional pain, discomfort leads us to one of two things: submission or perseverance.

To persevere is to pass the test; if one submits, he or she fails. However, if one earnestly submits one's pain to God, offering up his or her sufferings for the hope of solace in Christ alone, one has passed the test and gained 'something more.' This "offering up" brings pure joy.

Suffering is a central part of God's plan for the spiritual development of the individual. God calls Christians to take up their crosses daily and to walk with the suffering Christ. Christians mature through this suffering and are refined from a flabby spiritual state into a more fit form. Ideally, this process of suffering, reform and renewal will happen daily. It is only through the process of suffering that we grow closer to God. C.S. Lewis puts it best when he says,

We must lose our childhood will and learn instead "the necessity to die daily": however often we think we have broken the rebellious self we shall still find it alive. That this process cannot be without pain is sufficiently witnessed by the very history of the word mortification. Paradoxically, mortification, though itself is a pain, is made easier by the presence of pain in its context. (92)

When we put our pain in the context of suffering with Jesus, mortification becomes a spiritual pleasure. Thus, pain and suffering are the metaphorical weights that Christians lift as they strive for holiness, and to be "fully mature and lacking in nothing" (James 1: 4). Temporary discomfort is necessary for greater results. Christ is the spiritual trainer in the weight room that is life. Will we become like spiritual body-builders or remain sedentary?

The value of suffering is an irreplaceable theological tenet needed for the development of the Church. The early Christians were frequently persecuted, maimed, and martyred, yet their blood fertilized the seed of Christianity for it to grow and bear fruit. It also strengthened their resolve, solidified their belief, and increased their trust in God's plan. The early Church, specifically in Rome, would never have grown as quickly if it were not for the suffering it had to overcome and "offer up."

For most of the last 2000 years, Christians have kept the value of suffering as a

key part of their belief. This is starting to change, however, and it does not bode well for the future of the Church. For example, Douglas Hall cites evidence from Catholics in Quebec who showed a tragic loss, a “quiet revolution” in the late 1960s that included a removal of suffering objects and devotions, replacing them with a more secular worldview regarding suffering (44). This differs from the revolution that Jesus began when he accepted suffering and death in an extremely counter-cultural way. Hall gives the testimony of a man, a certain Beadet who witnessed the theological change and its effects on the Church and its members:

[W]hile his grandfather, a devout Catholic of the Old School, could accept and speak about the various experiences of suffering that came his way, his father, an enthusiastic advocate of the new secular approach, seems so locked into a gospel of success and, like the secular Protestant or Jewish Willy Lomans, has no point of reference on the basis of which to articulate his own pain. The symbolic images of success which in Quebec as elsewhere have replaced the wounded Jesus and the tormented saints - the smiling young people of TV commercials - do not permit the admitting of one's pain, failure, or anguish (44).

Since suffering is not only the human reality, but a central part of God's supreme plan, repressing it is extremely dangerous. When one does not see value in suffering and is unable to accept his or her own struggles, one also renders oneself unable to be compassionate toward others (Hall 45).

Yet, certain Christian theologians incorrectly interpret the nature of suffering and are unable to understand how it brings pure joy. One such theologian is Mary Ann McKibben Dana. She misinterprets Romans 5:3-4: “We boast in our sufferings, because suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...,” by unjustly eliminating God from every step of this cycle, as Paul had intended in his letter (Dana, 33). She argues that seeing value in personal suffering and perseverance detracts from the suffering of God (Dana, 35). She also sees God as having no plan for human suffering. This contradicts the central principles of both biology and

theology. While she is right to cite the need for God to complete our brokenness, her inability to accept personal suffering leads to a worldview that represses suffering. One should note that her whole argument fails to include any other biblical comment on the nature of suffering. To deny the value of suffering is to deny the plan of God. One must not follow her urgings or those of likeminded theologians.

#### ***IV. Conclusion***

Biologically and theologically, one cannot deny the value of suffering. Yet, in this secular world, both disciplines need new witnesses who will daily accept the struggles that are a necessary part of God's plan. The evolution of species and the personal development of each individual depend on this struggle. To repress the value of suffering would bring unspeakable consequences to humanity as a whole, and to the spiritual health of the individual. Science cannot continue to eliminate suffering from its textbooks if it wishes to follow the Darwinian evolutionary cycle; theology cannot continue to eliminate suffering from Churches if it wishes to follow the plan of God in Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus suffered "once and for all" not so that he may eliminate human suffering, but so that he could be the model of suffering for all to follow in a painful world. John Corapi's friend is a witness to many - dare I say a martyr - of the joy of suffering. Yet, one must note how he did not exclaim, "you can't believe the joy!" in reference to his forthcoming death. Rather, he refers to his suffering at that very moment as being incredibly joy-filled. Suffering with Jesus brings eternal joy after death, but an experienced sufferer can find pure joy in the act of suffering itself while still on earth.

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# Inspirational Thoughts



## Having Faith for someone else

By: Fr. Al Cylwicki

Kahlil Gibran was an early 20<sup>th</sup> century poet, philosopher, and artist whose works still inspire many people. Kahlil Gibran once wrote: “You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.”

Today’s gospel story illustrates Gibran’s saying in a very strong way. Jesus heals a paralytic man in a most unusual way (not unusual in the sense that faith is at the center of the healing, but unusual because it is the faith of others that seems central to the man’s healing).

Most gospel miracle stories that mention faith note the faith of an individual asking for a healing or of an individual person who was healed. We recall how Jesus acknowledged the faith of the centurion, the faith of the woman who touched his cloak, the faith of the Canaanite woman who dared to approach him, the faith of the woman who washed and anointed his feet, and the faith of the blind man near Jericho.

However, in this single instance, today’s gospel highlights the faith of the four friends who bring the paralytic to Jesus rather than the faith of the paralytic, who may or may not have had the same faith. Even though these four friends encountered obstacles while trying to reach Jesus because of the crowd, they were undeterred and found a way to bring the paralytic through the roof of the home.

In his book *Invitation to Mark*, Rev. Paul Achtemeier observes: “Faith is ascribed to the four who brought the paralytic man... These four let nothing hinder them from bringing the paralytic to Jesus. That is what faith means in this story.”

There are two main points about faith in Achtemeier’s observation. One point is the faith of the four men whose friendship was instrumental in bringing about not only a healing for their paralytic companion, but also forgiveness of his sins.

Let’s go back to Gibran’s statement: “You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.” Men of faith, the four friends gave of themselves (they gave their time and went through a lot of trouble just to bring the paralytic to Jesus. No material thing they could have given the cripple was worth more than that, and even if the cripple had not been healed, the gift of care and concern from his four friends would still have been priceless.

The second main point about faith in Achtemeier’s observation is its tenacity. Difficulties did not undermine the faith of the four friends; instead, their faith made them all the more determined. Possibilities of failure did not turn them away from their purpose; rather, they believed they would find some way to succeed.

Today we must examine our own faith and ask ourselves two questions. First, how can we be a faithful friend to others (faithful in the sense of giving of ourselves to them)? How can we bring blessings into the lives of others through our faith in the presence and power of Jesus?

Second, how can we strengthen our own faith to overcome obstacles we confront (whether in issues of health, finances, or relationships)? How can we believe more firmly that the Lord is always with us, and not allow anything to hinder us from serving him and our neighbor even to the point of heroism?

# Faculty Essay



## **THE MANY QUESTIONS OF RELIGION?**

**LEE P. CHASE**

One afternoon, in the quiet of a fall weekend, I searched the Internet for an article or news-bit on the subject of religion's relevancy in our world. Having found not one that spoke adequately to me on this subject – I decided to pen one myself. Upon making that initial decision, I was then confronted with a very obvious question – where does one begin with a topic such as this? Why is religion relevant?

I am sure that, if given the chance, one could study at length the moral and ethical codes of the Jewish Talmud, the Roman Catholic Catechism or even the Islamic Hadith. Morality is always relevant. Ethical debate makes for good controversy. Go to any pub or corner tavern on a Friday night, listen to conversations for fifteen minutes and invariably an ethical issue will be raised, debated (sometimes loudly), and resolved with no one changing their minds. It fills the gap of a conversational void with what seems to be intellectual. Yet, scratch the surface of that chatter and most other moral/ethical debate and you will mostly likely not find religion underneath.

Millennia of religious history can take us from the first fruit offerings given to the gods of the earth (Genesis' Abel paid dearly for his offering) to the very current movie actor, Tom Cruise, espousing the tenets of Scientology. And, good examples though they are, we will still be frustrated in determining the very relevancy of religion because those who practice religion do not, in and of themselves, make religion relevant in any more way than a patriotic president gives relevancy to democracy or the ideals of the founders of the United States.

No, the relevancy of religion can be found in something much more subtle and

intuitive. Relevancy is found in what can only be called the *mysterious*. For by its very reality, at the moment we are connected to or simply acknowledge the very existence of that which is utterly *other*, we are in religion's realm. Logic and reason bring us only so far in this quest. To acknowledge a god who reveals in the midst of the flooding Ganges, the burning of a Midian bush or the execution of an ordinary Jewish man who was experienced, by some, as extraordinary is to go to a place where human logic is confounded and reason breaks down. Religion is relevant simply because, and I even hesitate to write these words, *it is*.

A university survey course, whether undergraduate or graduate, introduces a student to the tenets of a religion. You will read the teachings, contemplate the doctrine and, possibly, even witness worship. Yet you will never truly encounter the truth of that religion until you are fully immersed into the practice of it. Until you can breathe the Buddhist air of tranquility, imbibe the Catholic spirit of social outreach, or dance the Whirling Dervish of the Sufi – and recognize in each the encounter with the utterly *other* – you will not truly understand religion itself. If you cannot respect the encounter with the utterly other, even if completely foreign to your human experience and wiles, you will never fully understand humanity itself.

Could this be why religion is resisted? The encounter of the other is not always pleasant. It too often happens in the worst of times and is rife with danger. It is gazing into a mirror and seeing the complete reflection returned, with all its cracks and growing wrinkles. We live in a culture where people have the greatest of difficulty admitting their day off from work was the adult equivalent of playing hooky. Is it any wonder divinity is denied? “Don't point out my mistakes, bub, life is hard enough.” The Roman Catholic Easter Proclamation exalts the “*happy fault...necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a redeemer.*”

Faults are where earthquakes happen. And, quite frankly, they scare the hell out of us.

Religion exists in the human plane. It becomes a vehicle for someone to cope with the overwhelming grief of a lover's death. If it gives meaning and purpose to someone who finds that nowhere else, it has accomplished its task. The word itself means to bond and to bring together (to tie up loose ends, if you insist). It beckons the person who would start out on its path to confront whatever needs to be confronted.

Growth is the goal, maturity's purpose made known and sought. Spirituality becomes not the end in itself, but the means by which the road is traversed. It is the walking stick that must sometimes become the weapon. "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him," teaches the Zen master. We are never finished products.

Religion is powerful. It can, literally, move people to move mountains. Yes, it can drive planes into buildings and encourage some to explode themselves in busses filled with tourists on a Jerusalem street. It can also move people to open a hospice home for those dying of AIDS or bathe a leper before he dies. Religion nudges a person to scour New York City streets for teenage runaways, saving them from the sex industry of Times Square. This is religion's visage seen over millennia in faces of all color. It may make the next to last item on the 11 o'clock news.

Religion is paradox at its best and its worst: *I set before you life and death, a blessing and a curse, now choose. (Deut. 30:19)* The Pentateuchal verse could be a challenge as much as an offer, if we let it. Is it my life set before me or another's? What exactly is life supposed to be about? And does this very question lead me to another understanding of religion itself or simply beg the question? Do we pester the matter too much? Has God turned off the celestial microphone and stopped listening? That same volume told us two books and some verses before

this one that God was tired from all the work God had done. How does divinity grow weary? In what way does Spirit yawn?

It strikes me that God might be tired because of us, these little fragments of celestial imagination who continually bother with our complaints, laundry lists of wishes and queries that go unanswered, so that we wake up tomorrow and ask again. Can you blame God for not answering most prayers? There would never be any rest. It says in Genesis, that first blurb of sacred writ which most Christians and Jews encounter, that God rested on the seventh day and blessed it. "The Bible," wrote Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel "is more concerned with time than space." I will go with the learned rabbi on this only as far as I can distinguish bluntly and without any reservation between God and the Bible. I think God is more concerned with us, and not in the way we would be concerned with ourselves. But giving the rabbi his due, I think time is more important than space. For that thesis, I would be willing to submit to the rack.

Time is something of which I have become acutely aware. As my own time goes on, it seems I measure it not with a clock or the calendar on my library's door but with the ever appearing gray hairs on my head and the evermore fading memories and irrelevance of my young adulthood. Clocks measure minutes. People measure time. I woke up one morning absolutely convinced it was Monday. I left my bed, drank my coffee and showered. As I dressed, I wondered aloud to no one why there was no movement outside my window. Gazing at the clock, a habit I do not have (unfortunate for that day at least), I saw it was only 5:40 a.m. Unashamedly, I continued my waking-up routine with actual exhilaration because of the found time I had acquired to get things done. It was quite a shock for me to realize only a few moments later that it was not Monday but Saturday. Somehow, my brain had lost two days in

the matter of a few minutes. This self-delusion moved into full-blown red-faced shame. The final straw came when I thought of the hours I had lost to simply sleep-in.

I wonder if, along with weariness, God ever lost track of time. Did God ever become red-faced or whatever way divinity displays embarrassment? This had to have happened at least once. When I read further on from the seventh day of creation, to the story Cain and Abel (that sacrifice of offerings that turned deadly, our first example of religion's danger) – God did not know where Abel was and had to ask Cain. My students are always quick to point out that God was only playing with Cain, trying to get him to 'fess up! Of that, I am not so sure. I heard once that Genesis is the story of God growing up and learning how to god. That resonates better for me, especially at six in the morning on a Saturday. Religion's relevance seems less than important at moments of profound human fallibility.

My own questions still haunt me: why is religion here and is God tired or embarrassed? Really, what's the point? After all the time since everything was created and we started filling up the heavenly sound waves with our rattle, wouldn't God be ready to sleep in? Really, could you protest? Even after having asked that question, am I only projecting myself and you with me onto heaven's white wall?

In making the choice to seek out religion's relevancy, I ultimately find myself looking into a reflective mirror (albeit darkly) and seeing humanity's own quest. We are here and we want to know why. What brings authenticity to our lives? These are the existentialist's questions which religion asked first. Have you noticed that there are many more questions on this quest than answers? Religion is at its best when it asks questions.



