

Personal Notes  
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By reintegrating their personal experiences with the Liturgy, the Faithful test [in the Greek δοκιμαζειν,<sup>1</sup> the *Nova Vulgata* uses *probetis*<sup>2</sup>] the meaning of their lives as an acceptable sacrifice to God. As Francis Moloney words it, “as always, it is the interplay between the sacred text and myself as its reader, enriched by a serious sharing with other readers who regard the same text as Scripture, that has led me to this surprising conclusion [elaborated in his scholarly article, cited below].”<sup>3</sup> Sacred Scripture is full of surprises.

Jeremiah begins by claiming that while he is serving the Word, the Word is not serving him. Jeremiah uses language that can imply rape. The key words to listen for in the *Lectionary* are *violence*; *you are stronger than I*, and *crying out*.<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 20:7-12 is a prayer.<sup>5</sup> The experiences of Jeremiah roll down through the ages in frightening array, a type of surprise within the context of a loving God.

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<sup>1</sup> See William D. Mounce, Zondervan Greek Reference Series: the Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House: A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1993) 151.

<sup>2</sup> Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio: Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II ratione habita iussu Pauli PP, VI Recognita Auctoritate Joannis Pauli PP, II Promulgata Editio Typica Altera (Liberia Editrice Vaticana: Editio typica prior: a. MCMLXXIX; Editio typica altera: a. MCMLXXXVI; 1986 Editio maior: ISBN 88-209-1523-5).

Because the following *Nova Vulgata* wore out, I began using the above beginning with the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 23, 2004. While the above 1986 volume is bound better and is the edition seminarians used at The Catholic University of America in the Spring of 2004, the 1986 date is twelve years before the one below, which wore out.

Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio: Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II ratione habita iussu Pauli PP, VI Recognita Auctoritate Joannis Pauli PP, II Promulgata Editio Typica Altera (00120 Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979, 1986, 1998) ISBN 88-2209-2163-4, 2130.

<sup>3</sup> Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., “The Gospel of John as Scripture,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July 2005) 468.

<sup>4</sup> William L. Holladay, “Elusive Deuteronomists, Jeremiah, and Proto-Deuteronomy,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 1 (January 2004) 66.

<sup>5</sup> Jon D. Levenson, “Some Unnoticed Connotations in Jeremiah 20:9,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 1984) 224.

Psalm 63:4 proclaims that God's *kindness is a greater good than life*. Psalm 63:2b, the Responsorial antiphon, insists, *my soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God*. Foreshadowing Saint Paul, Romans 12:2, Psalm 63:3 declares, *for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts*. While the Lectionary omits Psalm 63:10, verse 10 reveals that Psalm 63 is a call "for vengeance upon the perpetrators of the violence inflicted upon the psalmist,"<sup>6</sup> *may those who are hounding me to death go down to the depths of the earth, given over to the blade of the sword, and left as food for jackals*.<sup>7</sup> Such a call for vengeance is understandable in the Black Apostolate, especially in the United States of America. Psalm 63:10 appears too much of a surprise to suit the tastes of the Lectionary.

Father Charles E. Curran warns about "using scripture in a homiletical and catechetical way but not recognizing critical biblical scholarship." The 1993 encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, by Pope John Paul II, uses Romans 12:2 as the text for Chapter 2, "The Church and the Discernment of Certain Tendencies in Present-Day Moral Theology." Curran comments, "at the very minimum, there is no logical or necessary connection between the scripture text and the enunciated theme."<sup>8</sup>

Curran explains how John Paul II uses Romans 12:2. In *Veritatis splendor*, John Paul II recognizes that the formation of conscience calls for "continuous conversion to what is true and what is good," as Romans 12:2 does exhort.<sup>9</sup> The problem for Curran is that John Paul II does not go far enough.

Curran holds that one can act when one finds "the peace that comes from the person's finding the true and good." John Paul II limits the ability to act to "the service of a legal model of conscience,"<sup>10</sup> one that I would examine for prioritizing

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<sup>6</sup> Wilma Ann Bailey, "The Sorrow Songs: Laments from Ancient Israel and the African American Diaspora," in Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation, Randall C. Bailey, ed., (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 64.

<sup>7</sup> Verse 9 in Henry Wansbrough, General Editor, The New Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1985) 875-876.

<sup>8</sup> Charles E. Curran, The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 47-48.

<sup>9</sup> Charles E. Curran, The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 129.

<sup>10</sup> Charles E. Curran, The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 129.

legal politics over moral or any other kind of truth. The issue of a malformed conscience is germane when preaching at the funeral Mass of a suicide victim. The problem is to whom does the malformed conscience belong?

Curran worries about moral certitude for papal teachings. Curran writes,

... papal moral teachings in the past have been changed in the course of time. Think of such issues as religious freedom, democracy, slavery, usury, the right to silence, capital punishment, the ends of marriage, and the role of women in family and society. The very fact that such changes have occurred despite papal teaching to the contrary indicates that such papal teachings cannot always claim certitude and at times have been wrong.<sup>11</sup>

Curran also has something to say about the morality of killing, if not suicide directly.

He [Pope John Paul II] develops strong scriptural arguments for the incomparable worth and equal dignity of all human persons—a position that resonates in the hearts of all people of goodwill. On the specific moral condemnations, there is less certitude than the pope is willing to admit.<sup>12</sup>

The Pope and the Teaching Magisterium can make mistakes. That notwithstanding, the Scriptures are full of allusions to the Word of God being like bodily food. The Holy Eucharist changes the allusion into reality. Within this reality, Saint Paul admonishes the Faithful to be *transformed by the renewal of your mind* (Romans 12:2), a slightly different translation from that of the Pope, above. Such transformation from a renewal of the mind requires preaching the Gospel.

Romans 12:1 is an exhortation about the ministerial priesthood. As is his practice, Paul develops his case before issuing the recommendation.<sup>13</sup> Dennis Hamm, S.J. observes,

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<sup>11</sup> Charles E. Curran, The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 130-131.

<sup>12</sup> Charles E. Curran, The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 156.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Fiore, S.J., "‘Covert Allusion’ in 1 Corinthians 1—4," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 47 (January 1985) 86.

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Luke expatiates as an important theme through two volumes of narrative what Paul expressed in a single sentence of exhortation: "I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).<sup>14</sup>

The translation of Romans 12:1 is exactly the same as that in the Lectionary.

One function of the ministerial priesthood is to enable the Faithful to offer their bodies as acceptable offerings. For example, when a widow wears the cross her husband wore in his last illness, to his funeral Mass, she is making just that offering. According to The Eucharist in the West, "This radical self-offering of the faithful is the only spiritual response that constitutes an authentic sacrificial act according to the New Testament (Romans 12:1)."<sup>15</sup> I was at such a funeral Mass whereat the priest missed the point.

The meaning of Romans 12:1 is that "action is the only sphere in which commitment became real."<sup>16</sup> When the deceased is a suicide victim, the only action left is by the survivors. What to stress is not anything negative, e.g. "Do not commit suicide," but rather something positive, e.g. "Make your sacrifice a living offering, acceptable to the Father." Romans 12:1 highlights the debt theology of Saint Paul. The grace of God imposes an obligation on the redeemed to live a good life in debt to one another.<sup>17</sup>

At the funeral Mass I attended, the priest went on, ad nauseam, about how suicide was irrational and, thereby wrong. In this instance, it was not the dearly departed who was as irrational and wrong as the preacher was. Suicide can be a very rational act, for example, sparing caregivers both consternation and expensive treatments.

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<sup>14</sup> Dennis J. Hamm, The Tamid Service in Luke-Acts: The Cultic Background behind Luke's Theology of Worship (Luke 1:5-25; 18:9-14; 24:50-53; Acts 3:1; 10:3, 30" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 2 (April 2003) 231.

<sup>15</sup> As quoted by Edward P. Hahnenberg, "The Ministerial Priesthood and Liturgical Anamnesis in the Thought of Edward J. Kilmartin, S.J.," Theological Studies, Vol. 66, No. 2 (June 2005), 263, documented in footnote 35.

<sup>16</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., "Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor 6:12-20," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 3 (July 1978), 393.

<sup>17</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Why the 'Weak' at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000) 73-74.

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What is wrong is excoriating the deceased and, thereby, placing his wife in such a defensive position that she proclaims that she is not ashamed of anything her husband did. What is wrong is letting those without a need to know, know that the deceased would not let those who loved him, love him. What is wrong is to imply that those who loved the deceased lacked enough love to prevent the suicide, by preaching that the deceased would not accept love.

Writing about the above sermon makes me feel like Jeremiah 20: 9 in the Lectionary, *but then it* [my need to speak out against destructive sermons] *becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.* Care of the Sick uses both Romans 12:1-2 and Psalm 63,<sup>18</sup> as means of consolation, rather than invective.

To turn in a more gentle direction, as Vatican II words it in Presbyterorum ordinis:

For it is by the apostolic proclamation of the gospel that the people of God is called and gathered so that all who belong to his people, sanctified as they are by the holy Spirit, may offer themselves “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1). Through the ministry of priests, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is completed in union with the sacrifice of Christ the only mediator, which in the Eucharist is offered through the priests’ hands in the name of the whole church in an unbloody and sacramental manner until the Lord himself shall come (see 1 Cor. 11:26).<sup>19</sup>

Ephesians is a reminder that life is lived in the context of other lives. The Lectionary prayer fits my personal needs, *May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts, that we may know what is the hope that belongs to our call (cf. Ephesians 1:17-18).*

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<sup>18</sup> International Commission on English in the Liturgy: A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences, The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum: Approved for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1983) 267, 289.

<sup>19</sup> As quoted by Edward P. Hahnenberg, “The Ministerial Priesthood and Liturgical Anamnesis in the Thought of Edward J. Kilmartin, S.J.,” Theological Studies, Vol. 66, No. 2 (June 2005), 277, documented in footnote 80.

In the Gospel, Jesus calls Peter *Satan*. One issue associated with this verse, Matthew 16:23, is pacifism in time of war. John Wyclif (1330-1384) included this verse to conclude that in practice, a just war was next to impossible. Wyclif was well acquainted with the medieval traditions of just war and crusading.<sup>20</sup>

Scholars participating in the late Twentieth Century quest for the historical Jesus, regard this verse as something Jesus said, word-for-word.<sup>21</sup> The Lectionary issue is between being lifted up in the eyes of the world verses being lifted up in the eyes of God. The eyes of God look to the Cross, for example, utterly disregarding the temptations Satan offered to Jesus in the desert, as Jesus began his public ministry.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the eyes of that widow were lifted up to her own Cross, the pain compounded as the preacher excoriated her deceased husband for “making a wrong decision,” suicide.

Matthew 16:16—17:8 shifts from a consideration of the Transfiguration to focus on Jesus, the Son of God, and the universal judge.<sup>23</sup> While it is the function of the *alter Christus*, the priest, to judge, the function is to judge with mercy for the forgiveness of sins, rather than to lambaste the dead for their failings.

The Lectionary Matt 16:21-27 passage is the first prediction of the Passion in Matthew.<sup>24</sup> That prediction was an “experienced present,”<sup>25</sup> something the widow felt, because I did too. There was no need to dwell on what may have been a bad decision by her husband. Even if it was a bad decision, it was not a decision made

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<sup>20</sup> Ian Christopher Levy, “John Wyclif: Christian Patience in a Time of War,” Theological Studies, Vol. 66, No. 2 (June 2005) 337.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., review of John P. Meier, A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Vol. 3, companions and Competitors in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No 4(October 2002) 772.

<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey A. Gibbs, “Israel Standing with Israel: The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel (Matt 3:13-17),” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 526.

<sup>23</sup> W. R. G. Loader, “Son of David, Blindness, Possession, and Duality in Matthew,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 1982) 583-584.

<sup>24</sup> Mark J. Goodwin, “Hosea and ‘the Son of the Living God’ in Matthew 16:16b,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No 2 (April 2005) 265.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce J. Malina, “Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 16.

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with evil intent. Saint Alphonsus Ligouri and the common opinion of theologians agree that an invincibly ignorant decision can be virtuous; something neither Pope John Paul II nor the preacher in question may want to accept.<sup>26</sup>

In the Lectionary Gospel, Jesus not only predicts that he will suffer a violent death, but that his disciples can expect the same.<sup>27</sup> In the final analysis, Jesus promises to make everything right, *for the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct*" (Matt 16:27).<sup>28</sup>

In the next verse, Matt 16:28, Jesus prophesies his Parousia or Second coming.<sup>29</sup> *In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death before they see the Son of man coming with his kingdom.* Why not explain that means death of the soul rather than death of the body? That by accepting the physical loss of life, whether of one's own life or that of a loved one, the Faithful protect their own souls in the very spirit of Romans 12:2?

A careful reading of Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23, 20; 18-19 and Luke 9:22, 18-31-33 against Mark reveals that Mark 8:31; 9:31, 10:33-34 has Jesus say he would rise "on the third day" against Matthew and Luke who have Jesus say he would rise "after three days."<sup>30</sup> The liturgical issue is when to celebrate Easter. The reality that Jesus both rose from the dead in his own body and in the bodies of the Faithful is what is significant at a funeral Mass.

Like Jesus, the Faithful are also to rise from the dead, something more charitable on which to dwell for the three little daughters of a suicide victim, than that their father had made a bad decision. If their earthly father had made a bad decision, those three little girls were liable to think that their Heavenly Father had made an even worse decision taking their earthly father from them. Those little girls may have

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<sup>26</sup> Charles E. Curran, The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 128-129.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara E. Reid, O.P., "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2004) 238, 241.

<sup>28</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare, "How Jewish Is the Gospel of Matthew?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000) 274.

<sup>29</sup> Randall E. Otto, "The Prophets and Their Perspective," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April 2001), 234.

<sup>30</sup> John M. Perry, "The Three Days in the Synoptic Passion Predictions," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 4 (October 1986) 637-638.

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been deeply angered at preaching that seemed to excuse God for taking their father at the expense of blaming their father for an intolerable situation.

These Lectionary readings are about accepting the Cross as a means for glorification in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jeremiah keeps insisting that God is correct, even though his own personal welfare is in a shambles. Psalm 63 continues to praise God, despite difficult personal circumstances. Romans is about making a personal oblation of one's own body, meaning one's own physical well-being. Finally, the Gospel is about keeping one's own soul as the worthy price of giving up things of the world. By reintegrating their personal experiences with the Liturgy, the Faithful test the meaning of their lives as an acceptable sacrifice to God.

For more on sources see the Appendix file. Personal Notes are on the web site at [www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes](http://www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes).