

The human vocation is to solve problems, from the moment of birth to the moment of death. Jesus and Paul set the example, suffering not only to expiate sins, but also to exemplify how to live Christian lives. Problems beset them both.

While the Kingdom of God promises to end problems, the analogy to earthly kingdoms implies no such promise. As Shakespeare worded it, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."¹ *Kingdom of God* means that, somehow, God, too, joins human suffering in the great cosmic battle between good and evil.

Colossians plainly describes cosmic creation. Once God is responsible for cosmic creation, God is also responsible for the destructive aspects of evolution. Birth begins as a parasite in the mother and ends as a return to dust. In between, humans deal with the problem of the meaning of life, especially as God offers solutions to those problems. See the After-action report at the end for a revision of these statements.

Annotated Bibliography

Material above the double line draws from material below the double line. Those uninterested in scholarly details should stop reading here. If they do, however, they may miss some of the fun stuff scholars are digging up.

First Reading: 2 Samuel 1-3

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5

This reading is available for Funerals.²

¹ John Bartlett, edited by Emily Morison Beck and the editorial staff of Little, Brown and Company, Familiar Quotations: A collection of passages, phrases and proverbs traced to their sources in ancient and modern literature: fifteenth and 125th anniversary edition, revised and enlarged (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980) 206.19 *Henry IV, Part II, III, I, 31*.

² N.a., 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 IV: Order of Christian Funerals: Including Appendix 2: Cremation: 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 Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1998) cf. p. 6, 68, 289.

Psalm 122:5

Melody D. Knowles, "The Flexible Rhetoric of Retelling: The Choice of David in the Texts of the Psalms"³

Knowles observes changes from the Jewish Masoretic Psalter, to the Septuagint Greek Psalter, to the Psalm scrolls found at the Dead Sea. The ancient Jewish text uses *David* far less than the other versions. Psalm 122:5, however, in accord with the Jewish text, briefly names David, but that is all. Knowles, therefore, thinks that Psalm 122 is authentic and little tampered with over time.

Second Reading: Colossians 1:12-20

The Lectionary also uses Colossians 1:15-20 at reading 105C, the Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, this year, July 15th. A comparison of the translations finds a proper noun, *Christ Jesus* at 105C and a pronoun, satisfying the Greek, at the longer reading for this Sunday.

Within the past two months, I watched a priest on EWTN television object to people decorating a casket with balloons. They decorated, because the funeral service was supposed to be joyful. The priest said, joyful, yes; fun, no. Bette and I see plenty of fun, irony, and good humor associated with following God. The priest looked as if he had been reading too much of St. John of the Cross. Yet the priest may have had his point.

In a profound way, there is nothing joyful or celebratory about witnessing the agony and death of another. Like Saint Francis of Assisi, one may welcome one's own death as a prelude to union with God; but for anyone else to welcome that death seems like a travesty. Even in cases, like cancer or a series of mini-strokes or other debilitating illnesses that cause witnesses to grieve before death occurs, celebration and joy seem inappropriate. To ignore the fact that death has occurred and pretend that nothing evil has happened, seems like folly. The crucifixion and death of Jesus is nothing to celebrate. What is appropriate is heartfelt sorrow for the sins causing that agony and death.

Saint Paul begins this reading giving thanks to the Father. *Giving thanks* in the Greek is close to another Greek word for buffoonery. I have a problem finding fun objectionable, though not buffoonery. Buffoonery is objectionable, immature, and self-defeating. God is fun. Growth and accomplishment and praise can be the best of fun. A life well-led is not only joyful, but also fun, right through to the grave, at least so it seems to me.

Colossians 1:16 expressed the cosmic reality. *All things were created through him [Jesus] and for him*. The idea of evolution out of a globe 4 billion years

³ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 2 (April 2005) 237.

old in a universe 16 billion years old in parallel with other universes, about which no one knows, suits Colossians 1:16. Below, two articles engage evolution. Thinking that there is nothing else to learn in the spiritual life is like thinking there is nothing else to learn in any other aspect of life.

Colossians 1:18

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, United States Catholic Catechism for Adults⁴

The Bishops use this verse as part of their Doctrinal Statements in Chapter 8, “The Saving Death and Resurrection of Christ.” The Statement is, “Christ is the ‘firstborn from the dead’ (Col 1:18) and so is the principle of our own resurrection, now by the salvation of our souls, and at the end of time, when new life will be given to our bodies.”

Later, the Bishops quote the Catechism of the Catholic Church (the Pope’s catechism).

Christ, ‘the first-born from the dead’ (Col 1:18), is the principle of our own resurrection, even now by the justification of our souls (cf. Rom 6:4), and one day by the new life he will impart to our bodies (cf. Rom 8:11). (CCC, no. 658)⁵

Why the Bishops use *firstborn* as one word on page 99, and first-born as a hyphenated word on page 155, escapes me. I have checked the English version of the Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] and there did find *first-born* as a hyphenated word. The Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary does not hyphenate *firstborn*.⁶

In Chapter 23, “Life in Christ—Part One,” the Bishops have an insert from the Pope’s catechism in the midst of text labeled “The Excellence of Virtues.” The pertinent part of the insert is as follows.

⁴ Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006 99.

⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006) 155.

⁶ <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/unabridged?va=first-born&x=0&y=0070923>.

1. How are we created in the image of God?

It is in Christ, 'the image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15) that man has been created 'in the image and likeness' of the Creator....By virtue of his soul and his spiritual powers of intellect and will, man is endowed with freedom, an 'outstanding manifestation of the divine image' (GS [Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*]. (CCC, nos. 1701, 1705)

The Magisterium offers no comment on freedom to dissent.

Col 1:15-20

Margaret Y. MacDonald, review of Marianne Meye [sic] Thompson, Colossians and Philemon⁷

Thompson works to bridge the gap between biblical studies and systematic theology. Part of that bridge includes verses 15-20. MacDonald writes, "... in commenting on Col 1:15-20 and God's work in creating and redeeming the world (especially verse 16), Thompson points to Philo's use of Greek categories of causation and Irenaeus's image of God as creating and re-creating the world with God's own hands, namely, the Word and the Spirit (p. 30). Such comparisons highlight the importance of Colossians for New Testament theology ..."

Col. 1:16-17

Gloria L. Schaab, "A Procreative Paradigm of the Creative Suffering of the Triune God: Implications of Arthur Peacocke's Evolutionary Theology"⁸

Denis Edwards also deals with evolution below. Schaab describes the problem. "As evolutionary processes demonstrate, however, the being and the becoming of all things in the cosmos is inevitably attended by suffering and death in the movement toward emergent existence."

Col 1:18, 18

Bruce J. Malina, "Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?"⁹

Malina uses *firstborn* throughout. Malina means that who comes first makes possible all who come later. Malina words his thought as follows, "The remainder of the harvest is seen in the first fruits that enable the rest of the harvest to be put to use ... just as a tree's branches were already in the roots and the whole lump of dough is in the dough of the first fruits ..."

⁷ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 3 (July 2007) 597.

⁸ Theological Studies, Vol. 67, No. 3 (September 2006) 551.

⁹ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 16.

Col 1:20

Denis Edwards, "Resurrection and the Costs of Evolution: A Dialogue with Rahner on Noninterventionist Theology"¹⁰

Edwards grapples with the destructive aspects inherent in evolution. Edwards writes, "Only an omnipotent love can give itself away in radical vulnerability." In other words, by permitting destruction, God is vulnerable to people misunderstanding divine love.

Col 1:24

Jerry L. Sumney, "'I Fill Up What Is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ': Paul's Vicarious Suffering in Colossians"¹¹

Sumney distinguishes between suffering that is expiatory and exemplary. Exemplary suffering shows the Faithful how to accept suffering in order to solve problems directly. Expiatory suffering solves problems in place of another agent. Both types of suffering have a legitimate place in Christian theology.

The Lectionary omits verse 24, to which Sumney refers. The Lectionary generally omits problematic verses. That notwithstanding, I think that the very vocation of being human centers on problem solving.

Alleluia: Mark 11:9, 10

¹⁰ Theological Studies, Vol. 67, No. 4 (December 2006) 817.

¹¹ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 4 (October 2006) 664-680.

Gospel: Luke 23:35-43

This reading is available for funerals.¹²

Luke 23:35

John Clabeaux, "The Story of the Maltese Viper and Luke's Apology for Paul"¹³

Clabeaux brings out the fact that "Paul is the chief character in 60 percent of the content of Acts (seventeen chapters out of twenty-eight, and the death of Paul is a matter of great concern to Luke." Clabeaux goes on to show widely-accepted parallels "between the `trial(s) of Paul' in the later part of acts and the trial of Jesus in Luke 23." Problem-solving is part of the Christian life.

Luke 23:35b

Richard J. Cassidy, review of Willard M. Swartley, Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics¹⁴

Swartley spent his life studying *peace* in the New Testament. Cassidy approvingly quotes Swartley quoting Richard Hays that, "There is not a syllable in the Pauline letters that can be cited in support of Christians employing violence." This study is "a landmark contribution to New Testament Theology and ethics." Not using violence is problematic for Christians beginning with disciplining children in the home, extending to international relations. The JustFaith topic of Militarism seems germane to this study.

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

¹² N.a., 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 IV: Order of Christian Funerals: Including Appendix 2: Cremation: 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 Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1998) 263.

¹³ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2005) 605, 606, 607.

¹⁴ the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 2 (April 2007) 376.

After-action Report

The phrase in the third paragraph, *Birth begins as a parasite in the mother*, is not only politically incorrect, but even misleading. After the word *dust* a sentence extolling the value of human life is needed, especially in this Advent Season, celebrating the pregnancy of Mary, getting ready to bring the Son of God, Jesus Christ, to birth.