DIMENSIONS

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

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On Jordan's Bank

In one particularly memorable episode of the 1960's TV show *Batman,* the Caped Crusader's arch-nemesis Penguin (played brilliantly by Burgess Meredith) surveyed the wreckage of yet another defeat of his forces by the Dynamic Duo. As he looked at his defeated henchmen strewn across the floor, the Penguin muttered through clenched teeth in his distinctive whine, "Every one of 'em has a mother." Indeed, the Penguin lighted on a profound truth. Every one of us – even when we seem just one more piece of fodder for the relentless engine of history – has a mother, a personal history, a life story. We take each other for granted as we focus on our selfish needs or see life through the distorted lens of our own (or the novelist's, playwright's, actor's or director's) personal narrative, but everyone we encounter has his own story as well, and her own distorted lens and perspective. It seems important, then, to stop occasionally to consider the stories and perspectives of other people.

I had a Penguin-like moment in Church recently, thumbing through the pages of a hymnal on All Saint's Day. As I browsed, I thought of the various hymns that mark the Catholic liturgical calendar, and especially of the Advent hymns that we will soon begin to sing. "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" has become a sort of soundtrack to our Advent celebration over the years, and I began to look more closely at the lyrics, and even the publication information, of several Advent standards. I came to "On Jordan's Bank" and saw the lyricist's name – Charles Coffin. Who was he, I wondered, and how did his work become such a ubiquitous part of my religious experience? I resolved to find out more about the man. What I found surprised me.

Charles Coffin was born in the Ardennes region of northeastern France in 1676 and demonstrated signs of intellectual promise at an early age. He attended Plessis College in Paris and by 1701 was working as a protégé of the renowned classical historian Charles Rollin, whom he followed to the University of Paris. In 1718 Coffin succeeded Rollin as rector of the University of Paris. By now an established Latin scholar, Coffin published Latin poems and hymns, many of which appeared in the *Paris Breviary* of 1736 and in a collection entitled *Hymni Sacri Auctore Carlo Coffin.* A posthumous collection of his works published in 1775 filled two volumes.

On his death in 1749, this "saintly former rector" (the words are Princeton University professor Robert Darnton's), was denied burial by the parish priest of St. Etienne-du-Mont in Paris, acting on the orders of the Archbishop of Paris, who decreed that the sacraments would be denied to anyone who could not produce evidence of confession before an orthodox cleric. For Archbishop Christophe de Beaumont, orthodoxy was measured by acceptance of the papal bull *Unigenitus* of 1713.

Unigenitus condemned the tenets of Jansenism, a theological and spiritual movement with roots in the 17th century that emphasized human depravity and moral austerity. Jansenism became the great bugbear of the French Church in the reign of Louis XIV, with the Jesuits taking the lead in opposing the movement and Jansenists like Blaise Pascal responding to Jesuit attacks. Louis sided with the Jesuits, as did Pope Clement XI in his 1713 condemnation of Jansenism.

By the 1730's and 40's, the remnants of French Jansenism, including a number of prominent French clerics and scholars, were being rooted out by the French crown. The Jansenists found their champions in the French *parlements,* those regional courts led by nobility who chafed under the absolute rule of Louis XIV's successors. Charles Coffin had served as clerk to the *Parlement* of Paris. The *Paris Breviary* to which he had contributed was held in suspicion by some French churchmen for its "reforming" elements. Coffin's mentor Charles Rollin had been a well-known Jansenist, and the University of Paris was known to harbor Jansenist sympathizers.

The archbishop of Paris chose to make an example of Coffin and other Jansenists by refusing them access to the last rites and proper Catholic burial. The decision led to a torrent of protests – 10,000 Parisians were said to have joined in the funeral procession for Charles Coffin in 1749. "It was a political as well as a religious demonstration," Darnton suggests, "because the crown had backed the persecution of the Jansenists. And it probably reverberated among the common people, who had developed their own variety of Jansenism, a mixture of ecstatic religiosity and miracle healing. To deny the final absolution of sins to Christians on their deathbed was, in the eyes of many, to send them straight to Purgatory, an unforgivable abuse of royal and ecclesiastical authority." The *Parlement* of Paris joined the outcry, directing an official and strongly-worded "remonstrance" to the king in 1751 condemning his actions against the Jansenists. Indeed, some historians regard the monarchy's persecution of the Jansenists, and the resulting popular demonstrations on behalf of this persecuted sect, as key contributors to the growing disenchantment with, and "desacralisation" of, the French monarchy that would play into the coming French Revolution. Thus did the fate of a saintly scholar and writer of sacred hymns enter into the larger world of French politics and historiographical controversy.

The story of Charles Coffin demonstrates the power of history to touch lives across the centuries. Who would have thought that a scholarly hymn-writer could play such a role in the history of French religious turmoil and revolutionary politics? Who could guess that a French Jansenist, whose burial ignited a protest that contributed to a broader movement against traditional French society and culture, could speak to us so clearly as 21st century Americans

through his poems and hymns? Suddenly Jansenism and the French Revolution – historical moments that often seem so distant and disembodied – become real and engrossing. A real human being, touched by the real human drama of historical controversy, can still affect our lives every time we sing one of his hymns. Every time I sing "On Jordan's Bank" I will think of Coffin and his world. It reminds me of the immediacy of history and our common human heritage. Jansenism and the Jansenists are not that far distant. As the Penguin said, every one of them had a mother.

Richard J. Janet, Ph.D.

And We Beheld His Glory:
An Advent Reflection

In one of the most memorable scenes from the old movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the Nazis have recovered that ancient and revered Jewish artifact, the Ark of the Covenant. When the top of the Ark is lifted off to reveal its contents, out of the Ark drifts an ethereal figure like a ghost. And as the Nazis look directly at it, their flesh begins to melt away and their bodies implode. They have seen the glory of God, and it has consumed them.

The ancient Jews knew that no one could see the face of God and live. The presence of God in the tabernacle and temple was often personified as God's glory. To speak of the glory of God was to speak of God's all consuming presence. God's glory appears as a fiery presence on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 14:4, 17-18). The glory of God is said to fill the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35) and the temple (Isaiah 6:3) as a cloud. God's glory floods every corner of the earth, a scrutinizing presence that provokes a response of awe and terror.

At one point in the Jewish Scriptures Moses demands of God, "Show me your glory" (Exodus 33:18). God answers, ". . . you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). And so, as an act of mercy, God places Moses in the cleft of a rock and allows Moses to see the back of God as God passes by. But only the back, for no one can see God's face and live.

In light of this tradition, early Christians must have been astonished to hear these words: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory" (John 1:14). In Jesus Christ, God's Word, Christians have looked at the very face of God, yet have not been consumed. In the Incarnation of the Word, God has made God's own self known directly. "We have beheld his glory," John writes, "the glory of the only begotten Son of God" (John 1:14).

But today, it is easy to revert back to a kind of thinking that reflects a more isolated and localized view of God. Rarely are Christians so provincial as to claim that God's presence is limited only to their particular Christian denomination. The problem more often than not springs up when Christians move outside of the Christian faith. Many want to mold God into their own narrow framework, encasing him into their own private tabernacles.

Justin Martyr, an early Christian, wrote forcefully, and I think convincingly, that the "seed" of the Word that was made flesh has been scattered out among all cultures and time periods. And even though Jesus Christ became a man at a given point in history, in a specific geographical region, and to a particular culture, God has never left God's self without witness, so that wherever we find truth, justice, beauty, and goodness, God is at work.

Christmas is the celebration of the highest form of God's revelation, the Word becoming flesh. Yet, God is still at work making God's self known, and wherever the glory of God is seen in the positive accomplishments of humanity around the world, it is truly God at work.

But it is also possible to limit God's presence by restricting our own imagination when we think about God. In Jesus, Christians have seen God's glory, but the prophet Isaiah (6:3) says that God's glory fills *all* heaven and earth, a truth intoned by many Christians in their liturgy when they sing, "Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory."

When Isaiah spoke those words he did not know what we know today about the "vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns," as one Christian prayer has it. For example, we know that when we look at the nearest galaxy to our own Milky Way (Andromeda) we are seeing it as it was 2 million years ago, for the distance is so great it has taken that long for light to travel to earth.

And we know that if it were possible to travel to the edge of the universe, we would need to travel at the speed of light, approximately 186,000 miles per second, for 10-15 billion years to reach the edge. I don't have a calculator or a mind capable of handling those numbers. And as the universe continues to expand, God continues to create by allowing something to exist other than God's own self. The glory of God truly fills heaven and earth, and we must never shrink back from using our minds and imaginations to comprehend what we can about God.

In the final two chapters of the Christian Bible, John describes his vision of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem that descends from heaven. In ancient cities, the most prominent structure was the temple dedicated to the various

gods. John is startled to see that there is no temple in the heavenly city. He writes, "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it" (Revelation 21:22-24). And so John ends with the Christian fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's vision: the kings of the earth bring *their* glory into the city, for the world has seen *God's* glory in the Lamb. God now dwells directly with all people, and the glory of God made flesh in Jesus Christ now fills the heavenly city.

Ultimately, the glory of God that fills all heaven and earth also fills all humanity. We who are created in God's image glorify God by reflecting the character of God in our own lives. Though the entire universe is filled with God's glory, God's revelation attains its final goal when the glory of God is mirrored in the heart of each person as God's beloved son or daughter. This is our Advent challenge. May we know God's presence in our lives, and may we reflect that presence to others.

Wilburn T. Stancil, Ph.D.
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The God Beneath the Rubble
Part II

[*Ed. Note: This is the second installment in a series drawn from a manuscript by Father John Hix, a priest of the diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph who died in 2001. Father Hix's entire manuscript is being printed in this newsletter with the permission of his nephew, Dr. Gerald Miller of the Rockhurst University faculty.*]

The Tower of Babel—
Communication
Genesis 11:1-9

Throughout the earth men spoke the same language, with the same vocabulary. Now as they moved eastwards they found a plan in the land of Shinar where they settled. They said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them in the fire'. – For stone they used bricks, and for mortar they used bitumen. – 'Come,' they said, 'let us build

> *ourselves a town and a tower with its top reaching heaven. Let us make a name for ourselves so that we may not be scattered about the whole earth.*
>
> *Now Yahweh came down to see the town and the tower that the sons of man had built. 'So they are all a single people with a single language!' said Yahweh. 'This is but the start of their undertakings! There will be nothing too hard for them to do. Come, let us go down and confuse their language on the spot so that they can no longer understand on another.' Yahweh scattered them thence over the whole face of the earth, and they stopped building the town. It was named Babel therefore, because there Yahweh confused the language of the whole earth. It was from there that Yahweh scattered them over the whole face of the earth.*

Thousands of years ago in the fertile *land between the rivers*, as centers of population formed, a particular kind of structure was erected as a hub of community life. The ziggurat was a layered building, colored brightly, each ascending level somewhat narrower than the one below. It seems to have been a multi-purpose complex: certainly a temple, with a shrine at the very top; perhaps also a warehouse, as for the storage of grain; and a city hall, the site of administrative functions for the city. The ziggurat owed its existence and form to a conviction prevalent among inhabitants of the area—God's dwelling-place is in the mountains. They had come to the notion quite understandably. God, in their minds, and rightfully so, was associated with life—its giving, its sustenance. And that on which they depended for life had its sources in the mountains: the sun, which came up from behind the mountains [though it seemed to come from within]; the streams which flowed down as a result of spring thawing; and the storm clouds, with their lightning and thunder, which formed in the mountains and from there carried the moisture which fell in the valley.

God's home was in the rocky heights, but people were obliged to live where land could be cultivated, seed sown and crops harvested. Still they desired His presence among them, His care and protection. How would they entice Him to come and take up residence among them? They would do their very best to construct a mountain on the plains; the higher they could raise it above the level of the surrounding land, the better. Such is what the people of Babel, Babylon, strove to do [and, as a matter of fact, succeeded in doing], as did many other municipalities in the region.

The purpose was a religious one; the words of their prayer were bricks and mortar: they sought to persuade the Deity to establish what would be an

enduring relationship with them. Far from finding the project laudable, however, the biblical author [or authors] condemns it as an effort at self-aggrandizement rather than honor paid to the Creator. God frustrates the designs of the ambitious builders by diversifying their languages, rendering them incapable of communicating, and therefore, unable to collaborate on the work.

Human science and technology, then as now, outstripping human wisdom; the ability to do harm restrained only by internal strife within the group, the inability—or lack of will—to fully communicate.

Our kind has made truly amazing progress along so many lines: medical advances, exploration both of immense space and of infinitesimal particles of matter, nearly instantaneous calculations and transmissions. And yet we seem no more human, at times seeming much less, than the earliest of our species. Justice and compassion are wanting, as is a practical sense of solidarity, as we lavish our attention and concern on fictions, athletic contests, trifling lifestyles. When differences tend to divide us, we not only lack awareness and skills for reconciliation, humans today seem gifted for aggravating problems. We esteem power for its own sake, at once thrilled and entertained by demonstrations of the vast and varied capabilities of our science, technology and economic wealth—somewhat like the strongman elated by the rush of pride which accompanies his flexing of muscles. But we seem not to have given equal attention to the discovery of worthy applications of our abilities and accomplishments, how they may be directed toward the attainment of a better, happier life for all. Indeed, we appear to be at a loss as to where happiness is to be found.

In both the economic and political spheres, the tremendous concentration of power, resulting from such things as mergers and alliances, overly-aggressive competition and hostile acquisitions, is disturbing. The control by comparatively few over the lives of so many is especially frightening when there is the sense that moral considerations play little or no part in their deliberations. Contemplating such situations, one's best hope, at times, is that internal strife amongst those seeking to dominate will bring down what scant external pressure cannot.

Weekends spent training us to speak more intelligibly and listen carefully, workshops for the enhancement of all manner of sensitivity, programs promoting greater understanding across every possible difference—these and much more—are now staples of modern life. Reminders abound of the high percentage of difficulties and conflicts among people, individually, and as groups, which may be traced to inability or unwillingness to communicate. Babel notwithstanding, our having a common language proves not very helpful.

We use words as much to conceal or misrepresent thought as to reveal it, as much to prevent the transfer of knowledge as to bring it about.

There is an angry, frustrated summons to a conversation: making a show of attempting it in such a fashion as to defy its possibility and doom it to frustration.

> *All right, you want to talk, go ahead and talk! You begin. Let's see what you have to say – I can't wait to hear it. …I already know what you're going to say, we've been over this a million times before. …Don't tell me you're going to bring that up again – I'm so sick of that I could die! …Quit beating around the bush and come to the point, I haven't got all day. There are things I have to do and this is boring. …Tell me that you didn't say what you just said. I can't believe you would say something like that. …Well, I remember many times when you've said much worse things to me. …That's dumb; you're ridiculous. You can't really believe that. …Anybody in the whole world would tell you you're dead wrong. …Why do you keep twisting every word I say? …You're the one who said it; I'm just repeating what you said. Why don't you say what you mean? …Are you afraid you might just have to face the truth? …This isn't so pleasant now, is it? I told you our talking wasn't going to work, it never does, but you insisted and it was stupid to try. …You just don't understand. Why don't you try listening for a change? …You can't understand; you never will. …I feel worse than when we started. It's useless talking to you. …I give up – I quit!*

Such is a mere sampling of the so sad world of non-communication, wherein words are chosen for every purpose but true communication.

The tower of Babel was designed for a religious purpose. It was to constitute a motive for God's descent to the plain where a humanly constructed mountain, a feat of engineering ingenuity, would become His home. As such, it was doubly insulting. First, the supposition was that the Deity was subject to outside influences, that He could be persuaded, even manipulated. If people only knew which words to say, which rites to perform, which rules to follow, which buttons to push, a pliable God could be made to do their bidding. So the thinking went, and it defamed God by making Him outer-directed, rather than inner-directed.

Secondly, the temple in the valley assumed that God needs to be turned toward favoring His creatures; that is, that He is not naturally so inclined. Except when successfully petitioned and pleased, God was thought to be indifferent at best, and, at worst, capricious, temperamental, vengeful and cruel. People had to strive, then, to gain His active good will, often by painstaking means. Nowadays someone will be said to pray *very hard* for some divine gift. It's the same general idea: straining, sparing no energy to get on the good side of a remote unengaged God. Such a person might well be advised to pray *easy*—totally relaxed, with complete confidence in the Lord's constant and intimate desire to bless.

In any age, wherever humanity is to be found, Babel, as the rest of Genesis 1-11, is right here, right now.

Father John Hix

God In All Things

Here are six poems that I wrote in early summer 2006 for presentation at the 19th Annual Gerard Manley Hopkins Summer School in Monasterevin, Kildare, Ireland. The renowned Irish poet Desmond Egan, conference founder and chair, invited me to present my work written "in the spirit of Hopkins." A grant from the Thomas More Center helped defray my expenses. My presentation was entitled "God In All Things."

In the months before the conference, I reread Hopkins' poems and looked at many commentaries. I learned that whereas I found Hopkins' poems about God and Nature to be uplifting, inspiring, joyous, his critics noted that he was unsuccessful as a teacher and a preacher, was lonely, was estranged from his family, and often felt abandoned and sad. Many critics detailed the manifestations of depression in the poems.

This apparent conflict between joy and desiccation in Hopkins' poems informed my approach to the poems I was drafting "in his spirit." While I was transliterating my own visions into words, two personal challenges loomed: just as I was recuperating from cataract surgery and starting to drive again, my granddaughter was hospitalized with spinal meningitis. Images from these events shaped the poems.

"Too Brilliant" describes literally how, to the patient with new lenses, light blazes supernaturally and frighteningly from all surfaces.

"God Is In All Sparkly Things" dramatizes the family's vigil at the bedside of the sick child, the similarities among the generations, the search for meaning in suffering.

"Why Call Them Cataracts?" plays on the word for the eye condition and for the waterfall, describing the speaker's visit to Airey Force, the waterfall near Wordsworth's home in the Lake District.

"Who Walks In My Garden In July?" starts with the image of Yahweh in Eden; it uses spondees and sprung rhythm in an unrhymed sonnet that shows a garden menaced by the four elements in conflict.

"Caitlin's Angel," an unrhymed sonnet, compares the sick child to the guardian angel she sees.

"Mahakala" first contrasts the fantasies of paradise of a mother and a daughter, then dramatizes the tension in the speaker between the need for the ferocious protector Mahakala and the desire for a calm grandfather God.

God, or the Search for God, dominates these poems. There is anguish in the sense of God's absence, terror in the sense of God's arrival, sorrow in the lack of love, yearning for peace, fear of death. Like Hopkins' speakers, the personae of my poems feel lost, inadequate, bewildered. But, again as in Hopkins, they feel exhilarated by God's terrible power, comforted by their hopes, uplifted by nature's grandeur. These poems, while not imitating Hopkins' stylistic innovations, and no match for his mystic visions, are ecstatically inspired by his work.

Too Brilliant

Rushing toward me on the road is Jesus
in a burning bush, blazing, racing,
radiating, glorious: the sunlight glancing off
the fender of a silver motorcycle.

One car is a score of angels, fluffy white
and whirling, two cars, four cars proliferate,
transmogrify, transmute into waves of heavenly

hosts. The daytime sky is brilliant cerulean,

deep and flat. As night falls the streetlights
start to rotate, radiate Fourth of July
sparkler halos. As the sky turns black, the street-
lights catch fire, blaze out to whirling galaxies;

traffic lights explode red and green
and gold, and I am careening through a force
field of fireworks, and God and Trinity
and all their saints and angels and prophets are rushing

toward and around me, and God and everyone
who ever lived and entered into glory
is whirling around me, Jesus and Mary and all

my ancestors, and every angel ever painted
by Fra Angelico or imagined by Dante
is whirling around me. And dark glasses do not help.

God Is In All Sparkly Things

I.

Quiet here, end of the hall.
Outside, the sun shines,
but we sit in the dark.
Morphine, phenergan, potassium chloride
keep her comfortable.
Spinal meningitis – viral or bacterial?
Until the test results,
they are keeping her comfortable.

She says, "God is in all sparkly things –
in rainbows, stars, sun, water, diamonds, waterfalls;
God is in puppies, *sushi*, chocolate, grandfathers."

The air conditioning is not working.
So many cell phones, ringing all at once,
sick father, screaming grandson,
screaming and kicking for hours.

Her head throbs, she cannot turn. She moans.

Her face is grey. She vomits. She holds
her rosary, her blond hair fluffs around her face.
I stroke her arm, her mother rubs her feet.
Will she die?

Tests inconclusive. Tests contradictory.
Doctor away. Insurance ambiguous.
She is not comfortable. The morphine drips.

Where is God when there is so much frantic worry?
Is God in the frantic worry? Does God control the breathing?

II.

The generations clash --the elders forget their wild youth,
the middle ones continue their free days.
Stay at the party and dance wildly,
just do not leave with the handsome stranger.

Is God in common sense?
Does God protect the raped girl from death?

III.

They were dancing, drinking, laughing.
She remembers his car, the top down,
the wind whipping her golden hair;
she remembers his sparkling
blue eyes, "like heavenly jewels."

She remembers waking up in his bed;
does not remember how she got home.

Later she did not understand the pain,
the blisters. Never considered she might
be pregnant. She could not turn
her head, walk across the room.

IV.

Of what worth are propriety, morality,

rules of grandmothers, of churches?
What imports is safety: you must stay alive.
You must live. Live.

Was I that naïve? Was my mother wild?
Which girls are not wild?
Where is God? Please protect this child.

She says her angel wears a sparkly pink dress;
crystals crown her white-blond hair,
cascading like Botticelli's Venus's hair.
The angel's wings "shoot out of her back
when she needs to fly."

Morphine drips. Her head throbs.
We stroke her arm, massage her feet.
Who sees the angel? Who sees God?

Why Call Them Cataracts?

(Airey Force, Wordsworth's Lake District)

I hear the waterfall through the forest from far away,
a rushing and then the smell of damp earth and pine needles
and wet oak leaves and willows tangled along the stream.
We walk over the narrow stone bridge, and there it is,

as Wordsworth saw it. The smell, the sparkle; dampness and light.
The trees so towering and the rock fall as high as the sky.
Every glistening leaf and pine needle sharp against the dark.
The engaged couple plans to return here for their wedding.
My husband turns away, my daughter leaves the path.
I loiter on the bridge with my camera. Don't tell me why
they call them cataracts instead of fogs; fogs
are ghosts, they move like phantoms through the forest.

When I was at the waterfall, I was alone;
now all I remember is the waterfall.

Who Walks in My Garden in July?

Day lilies promise tangerine and pink,

mandevilla almost blooms, lilac grows tall,
but spindly, no buds. Hibiscus forced into iron lattice
refuses to flourish. Buds thirst. Clot, knot. Shrivel. Vines twine

rusting frame, loop, twist. Virginia creeper, trumpet
vines, nameless vines: blanket the coreopsis,
clematis, columbine; snake under mint, encircle
Italian terra cotta pots, wrap the fence,

strangle the lilac. Costly perennials guaranteed
to shoot up two feet, wither. Weeds masquerade, flaunt.
Sylphs desert the butterfly plant; gnomes tunnel
too deep; salamanders dismiss the burning bush,

hide in damp logs; undines desiccate like salted slugs.
Night deluge, day desert, summer sirocco. Damp dry chalky earth.

Caitlin's Angel

Caitlin says, "My angel's name is Alexis.
She has porcelain skin and vibrant green eyes;
and light pink fingernails and toenails like me.
Her dress is translucent silky pink with sparkly swirls.

Crystals crown her white-blond hair, cascading like
Botticelli's Venus's hair. Her wings, light pink
with crystals, shoot out of her back when she needs to fly.
She protects me." Caitlin holds her rosary,

her pale blond hair fluffs around her face.
Her face is grey. If she moves, her head throbs
and she vomits. I stroke her arm, her mother keeps
a cold cloth on her forehead. The first nurse

missed her vein. Morphine drips. The boyfriend
rubs her feet. Who sees Alexis? God?

Mahakala

I.
I wanted to be an iridescent butterfly

with wings like reflections of Chartres windows on the sunny
pavement – not the bright dark glass itself,
but the gossamer pastel shadows. Mother disagreed,

spoke of the whim of the wind, of evanescence.
She did not want to be a butterfly:
my lovely Titian-haired mother, my slender mother
of many wiggly children. She said she wanted

to be a cow: to sit quietly cared for,
comfortably eating alone in the shade,
useful but unmolested.

II.

Mahakala, the bodhisattva of
our clan, wears a Black Coat. He roars at the
evil spirits, all the bacteria
and viruses, all the bad blond young men,

the handsome seducers, the evil ones who steal
innocence and treasure. We need a ferocious
protector; I want a calm comforting lady,
but Mahakala is a fighter. I want

a quiet grandfather God in a long white robe.
I do not want the piercing light, the burning
bush, the whirlwind. I do not want razor
claws, blazing swords. Please Mahakala,

Saint Michael, gods on horseback: while you are out
smiting and pillaging microbes and parasites,

please leave with me a quiet Comforter;
please lay me down beside still waters,
in the shade.

Patricia Cleary Miller, Ph.D.

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THOMAS MORE CENTER NEWS

The Thomas More Center
and the Visiting Scholars Lecture Series
cordially invite you to . . .

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"Early Christianity, Gnosticism and *The Da Vinci Code*"

by

Robert Louis Wilken, Ph.D.
University of Virginia
Author – ***The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*** and
The Spirit of Early Christian Thought

Rockhurst University
Mabee Theater, Sedgwick Hall
March 8, 2007

THE ANNUAL THOMAS MORE CENTER CHRISTMAS RECEPTION

Wednesday, November 29, 3:30-5:30 p.m.
Greenlease Library Mezzanine

Food, Fun and Fellowship Abound!

ALL ARE INVITED

Spring 2007 Courses in Catholic Studies

CA1500 *Introduction to Catholic Thought and Culture*
(3 credit hours), Tues.-Thurs. 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m., Dr. R. Janet

CA3250S *Catholic-Jewish-Muslim Interaction in the Middle Ages*
(1 credit hour), Thurs. 2-2:50 p.m., Dr. Joanna Carraway

CA3500 *The Jesuits*
(1 credit hour), Tues. 12:30-1:20 p.m., Bro. Glenn Kerfoot, S.J.

THE THOMAS MORE CENTER EXTENDS TO ALL ITS FRIENDS WARMEST WISHES FOR A HOLY AND BLESSED ADVENT SEASON AND A MOST JOYOUS CHRISTMAS!

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