

Fr. John Reedy



Looking for the Lord

Managing Change in Religious Knowledge

I just finished a book on scripture which should have been more disturbing to me than it was.

So, I put the book down with several judgments:

A few observations on why it was not more disturbing might be of some help to readers who have trouble maintaining their balance on the shifting grounds of religious teaching and practice.

This book, by a respected Catholic scholar, rejected a whole series of biblical perceptions which had been part of the framework of my own religious thinking.

Even more disturbing, these perceptions have been part of my religious preaching and teaching, my effort to proclaim and explain the faith I profess.

When I closed the book, I faced a couple of choices:

I could reject the whole work — not by refuting the author's scholarship; I don't have the tools for debate on that level — but because his judgments seemed so contradictory to so many of my points of reference.

This wasn't acceptable because it seemed dishonest. It would be abhorrent for me to believe that my faith requires a deliberate refusal to examine a position seriously proposed as true.

On the other hand, I could give an assent of faith to the writer's authority as a scholar. This would call for an acceptance of all his judgments, with the subsequent effort to rearrange all my religious points of reference.

Fidelity to truth might at times call for such an adjustment, but psychologically and spiritually it can be a terribly difficult, intimidating effort.

I wasn't anxious to undertake such an effort. Moreover, my general understanding of developments in scripture scholarship argued against it. This is a field of study in which there is great movement; related developments in the study of language, archaeology and other fields offer assurance that the knowledge of scripture will continue to change, probably at an accelerating pace.

I'm not about to construct a whole new set of religious landmarks when the landmarks themselves seem to be in motion.

Moreover, I have a profound conviction that the saving gospel proclaimed by Jesus was intended for all nations, people of widely differing levels of culture and education. Scholarship can serve and enlighten faith, but a doctorate in scripture studies is not required for an act of faith.

I had become newly aware of a whole set of perceptions which seem to be the subject of scholarly exploration by scripture scholars. Some of them seem to be more firmly established than others, but I can't evaluate them on the basis of scholarly criticism. I'm simply aware that they are being examined.

In my preaching and teaching, I will have to be more careful about offering as truth interpretations which are being questioned by responsible scholars. But most of these interpretations have to do with the cultural background to faith, not with the subject of the act of faith itself.

On the basis of general information, I am completely convinced that 10 years from now this particular book, with many of its firmly stated judgments, will be outmoded, replaced with other judgments stated with equal force, possibly by the same author. I hope I'll be around to read those interpretations — with the same reservations.

But ultimately, my faith is not in scholars or in the techniques of scholarship. My faith rests in a person, in his identity, actions and teachings. My understanding of some of those teachings might have to change — as a husband's understanding of his wife might have to change. But my act of faith is like the commitment of love.

It is a perception of a person; it is a decision to commit myself to that person regardless of where the commitment might take me. And it can take me into situations much more difficult than a disorienting volume of scripture studies.

Forum

Did Jesus Smile When He Rolled a Spare?

By William Willoughby Religion Today

Washington — Well, I just read in the Congressional Record that the United States government has spent all the money they're taking out of me this year for income tax and for quite a few years to come to do a study on why bowlers, hockey fans and pedestrians smile.

In reading it I think I gained a little insight into why in only one place in the New Testament one can infer that Jesus might have smiled. That was after He had sent 70 or so men out on the road to give a trial run of preaching the Gospel. He listened to their tales of success (and some failure) and then it says He "rejoiced in spirit." I assume this means a smile broke across the Man-of-Sorrows' face.

The reason Jesus might not have smiled too much was not, however, that He was a sad or a morose person, but that when He bowled, He usually hit a strike, or at least a spare. My deductions come out of the conclusion of a National Institute for Mental Health study — with my tax money — to check whether smiling evolved as an expression of happiness, friendliness, or both.

One of the studies, which was part of a \$75,000 project, revealed that bowlers often smile when socially engaged, that is looking at or talking to others, "but not necessarily after scoring a spare or a strike." So, you see that Jesus, from all the data we have, might well have been a good bowler.

The conclusion in the National Institute for Mental Health report cited "a strong and robust association of smiling with a social motivation and an erratic association with emotional experience."

Ah, the sheer delight of scientific research!

But quickly let me shift gears here, lest a reader who

does not have a sense of humor take me seriously about Jesus being a good bowler. For some people, even if Jesus were in the modern context in which bowling is a sport, this would be a completely abhorrent thought to them.

Nonetheless, there remains the question: Does God laugh? Did Jesus ever crack up over a good joke?

Well, you'd better believe that God, by any mask He wears, does laugh — even if you don't find much evidence of it in a cursory reading of the Bible. We'd be in a whale of a lot bigger mess than we are if He didn't count on it.

Christians who generally believe that Jesus is as much God as is God or the Holy Spirit, often get the impression Jesus never enjoyed a good belly laugh when He was out with the boys or out observing the crowd.

He was, after all, the Suffering Servant, and when He made His foray onto this planet, He wept, He felt compassion for the multitudes. He became angry, and He was a man who prayed in solitude. A pretty heavy trip through the mud and mire of Earth.

But did He ever laugh? Did He ever get so tickled He couldn't stop laughing? Did He ever laugh so hard He cried? Did He just smile, even?

If not, some of the purest delights of human life eluded Him.

As one who has written about religion for close to 20 years, let me assure you that one cannot write all that long on that subject and not have a sense of humor. Anyone who doesn't have a sense of humor under those circumstances takes himself too seriously and doesn't take God seriously enough!

Looking Back . . .

75 years ago this week — Page 1 featured an architect's sketch of the "New Church of St. Charles Borromeo, Elmira Heights, N.Y." Written in the style of the day: "We present to our readers this week a picture of the new church . . ." It announced that Rev. Michael C. Wall would be the "rector." The architect was Joseph H. Oberlies.

The Catholic Church's "attitude" toward the

study and use of the Bible, in 1905, is interesting. While strongly upholding the good book and holding it in the "highest reverence," it nonetheless warns that "certain parts of these writings, though inspired by God, may become a stumbling block for the unlearned."

50 years ago this week — A good beginning that

fizzed: "President Rubio of Mexico Gives Cordial Greeting to Papal Delegate." The story tells of "friendly relations being evidenced." Sad to say, the sentiment didn't endure.

Another in the same vein: "King of Albania Puts Catholics In His Cabinet" is the headline over a story that announced that "better days appear to be ahead for the Catholic people of Albania."

A humorous note: "Knock on wood, Mrs.

Ellen Hayes, 100, of Hull, England, dropped dead the other day as she finished reading from the King of England congratulating her on her long life."

And social news: "Edda Mussolini, the 19-year-old daughter of Premier Mussolini, was married yesterday to Count Galeazzo Ciano . . . in the Church St. Joseph."

25 years ago this week — A front page story revealed that Pope Pius XII sent a relic of the True Cross to the German stigmatic Therese Neumann. The relic was sealed in a stone cross made by a man who had been cured of a spinal ailment after visiting Therese Neumann 22 years before.

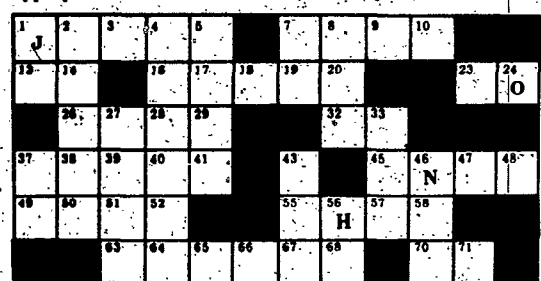
Sound familiar? Two stations in Steubenville, Ohio, banned questionable tunes and lyrics as part of nationwide campaign to clear up the airwaves.

And would you believe advertising on Page 1. And we thought only the New York Times, among American newspapers, did that! The ad was for Blanchard Florists.

Sunday Scripture Quiz

I. Gospel Reading: John 10:27-30 — Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gives us eternal life.

Below is a key passage from Sunday's Gospel reading. You can determine what this passage is by finding the answers to the questions below the puzzle and then putting the letters in their appropriate box. The first one is done for you.



- 1. Gospel writer: J O H N
- 2. Domestic animal: 5 28 51 18 20
- 3. Empty inside: 50 38 65 66 47 68
- 4. Be afraid of: 63 2 8 29
- 5. Round roof: 10 64 13 41
- 6. Contains moisture: 32 67 39 3 55

Based on scripture readings for Sunday, April 27, 1980, C Cycle.

Following are key passages from Sunday's scripture readings. Fill in the missing words.

II. First Reading: Acts 13:14-43:52 — Paul and Barnabas share the Good News at Antioch.

Phrase: Paul and _____ travelled on from _____ and came to _____ in Pisidia. On the _____ day they entered the _____ and sat down. Many _____ and devout Jewish _____ followed _____ and Barnabas.

III. Second Reading: Revelation 7:9-14:17 — Christ leads us to springs of life-giving water.

Phrase: I, _____ saw before me a huge _____ which no one could _____ from _____ every _____ and _____ people and _____. They stood before the _____ and the _____ dressed in long white _____.

Answers on Page 9

- 7. It's above us: 16 45 58
- 8. A servant: 52 28 43 23
- 9. Crime: 37 9 40 71
- 10. Affirmative: 33 57 7
- 11. Milk-by-product: 48 17 27 14
- 12. Can't talk: 70 4 49 19

Passage I words: John, sky, mute, fear, sheep, dome, maid, whey, hollow, moist, yes, vice.
Passage II words: Paul, Antioch, Barnabas, sabbath, Perga, synagogue, converts, Jews.
Passage III words: Lamb, crowd, John, robes, count, tongue, race, nation, throne.