











# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

**Preaching Biblical Justice**

*To Nurture the Faith That Does It*

**DENNIS HAMM, S.J.**

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## THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and women. Hence, the studies, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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*Dennis Hamm, S.J.*

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## *For your information . . .*

Any Jesuit interested in how we communicate with each other and with the world in which we work will discover in 1997 abundant material to remember and to use.

To start with remembrance, Peter Canisius, the very first Jesuit to publish a book, the most modern means of communication of his day, died just four hundred years ago, in 1597. That book, an edition of the works of Johann Tauler, the great German Dominican mystic, appeared in 1543, while Canisius was still a novice. And then in 1546 he published a new edition of St. Cyril of Alexandria. By then he had another first to his credit. He and his eight young companions in Cologne, fledgling Jesuits, had inadvertently contravened the regulations of the Cologne city fathers that forbade setting up any new religious houses in the city, where there were so many such tax-exempt institutions already in existence. So, Canisius and his companions were out of their house in the summer of 1544 by order of the Cologne Senate, the very first Jesuits "to be honored," as Brodrick says in his biography of Canisius, "with that decree of expulsion which would become a commonplace in his Society's history." A series of exhibitions and publications, especially in the Netherlands, Canisius's native country, and in Germany, the sphere of most of his apostolate, will celebrate this fourth centenary. Sometime later we may (no promises yet) have the opportunity to publish in English a selection of his writings.

Canisius is inextricably linked with another Peter, this one named Pierre Favre, who first directed him in the Spiritual Exercises and then received him into the Society in 1543 at the age of twenty-two. Later Canisius was to refer to his mentor as a "man of such shining holiness." (Canisius's stepmother waxed wroth because Favre, whom she called a "vagabond foreigner," had "stolen" her stepson, and Favre had to write a conciliatory letter to her.) In March of this year, for remembrance but much more for present use, *The Spiritual Writings of Pierre Favre* will appear as the most recent book from the Institute of Jesuit Sources. It bears the publication year of 1996, the 450th anniversary of the death of Favre. The volume contains in English translation both the *Memoriale* or autobiography/diary and more than two dozen of Favre's spiritual letters, in addition to a lengthy introduction. This book has been slow to appear, but Favre would surely understand; it took some three hundred years before the *Memoriale* was even privately published in Latin in 1853, and twenty more years before Favre was beatified in 1872 and a modern-language edition (in French in 1874) came out. Forty more years elapsed before the publication of his complete works and another sixty-five before preparation could begin on this present volume, which contains the first translation of the *Memoriale* into English and the first translation into any vernacular language of almost all of the letters in this book.

Letters summon up another instance of communication in the Society: the two men most responsible for its practice from our earliest years, Ignatius of Loyola

and Juan Polanco, and a CD-ROM, the latest instance of such communication. The computer disk far exceeds what they could ever have imagined and, we can hope, will prove most useful for the present day. This year marks the 450th anniversary of Juan Polanco's appointment as personal secretary to Ignatius of Loyola. Until Polanco took on this responsibility, Ignatius was making little progress in writing the Constitutions, and his injunction, now found in [673] of that document, that Jesuits should frequently communicate with one another by letter Ignatius himself would never have implemented to such an exemplary degree. For with Polanco's aid he was able to pen the almost seven thousand letters that are still extant. The Society owes Polanco a great debt in this regard. In recognition thereof, his name has been given to the new CD-ROM that contains in their original language on a single such disk all of the writings of Ignatius. This means both his major works (for example, the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Constitutions*, the *Spiritual Diary*, and the *Autobiography*, along with his lesser works, such as the "Deliberations on Poverty" and the "Common Rules") and all of his letters. The Institute of Jesuit Sources produced the disk and will make it available for purchase within a month of this issue of STUDIES.

The project could never even have begun without the extraordinary work of Father Roberto Busa, S.J., the world-renowned Italian expert in the literary and linguistic uses of the computer. It is he who, starting with punched cards almost fifty years ago and progressing to electronic bits and bytes, produced the *Index Thomisticus*, the compilation of all the works of Thomas Aquinas. He provided for us in computer-ready form the corpus of Ignatius's writings. To him we owe an immense debt of gratitude. And the data-base manager or search engine to make those writings available for the Polanco disk was produced by Mr. Thomas Schwarz, S.J., of the California Province, a scholar, mathematician, and professional computer expert. To him, too, our thanks are due for countless hours of work and high professional competence.

The international and interprovincial character of the project is further made evident in that Dr. Manfred Thaller of the Max Planck Institut at Göttingen in Germany did the first basic research on such a computer program for the text, the late Father Joseph Hopkins of the Detroit Province carried it on back here in the United States, and Father Martin O'Keefe of the Missouri Province, a staff member of the IJS, managed the details of producing the CD and its manual. Once you use the CD, let us know any suggestions for improvement that occur to you for the next version. (For instance, if we can get copyright clearance, I would like to put on the same disk translations into English, Spanish, French, German, and Italian of Ignatius's major works. But please do not hold your breath; even if it is possible to obtain all requisite permissions, it will take a good amount of time to implement the project.)

To return to communication by books, one from IJS and one from a university press, in between the book containing the Constitutions and Norms, a copy of which all United States Jesuits received, and the CD-ROM of the writings of Ignatius, the IJS published *Terpsichore at Louis-le-Grand: Baroque Dance on the Jesuit Stage in Paris*. For better than a century, at the Paris school which was perhaps the greatest such institution the pre-Suppression Society ever conducted, the students annually presented for the demanding Parisian public between one and four ballets. If

anything, this should give inspiration to present artistic endeavors in our schools and encourage even more such activities. The other volume, published by Stanford University Press, is entitled *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire and Beyond, 1540–1750*. The book in its seven hundred pages is worthy of the enterprise. It is a truly scholarly, informative, and fascinating account of one of the greatest stories in Jesuit history, how the Jesuits of the very first province of the Society took on a missionary enterprise that ranged from Japan, Indonesia, and India to Brazil, how they carried it out with the courage of idealism, the pettiness of daily realities, the generosity of personnel, the ambiguities of money and slavery, the success and failures of two centuries. The author, Dauril Alden, a professor at the University of Washington, says in his preface to the book, “I bear no religious affiliation and hold no brief for or against the Jesuits or any other religious body. Yet I confess that one of the reasons why I chose to study the Jesuits was to challenge my own sense of scholarly objectivity.” After more than two decades of work with “research on four continents in more than thirty-five archives and in general and specialized libraries, both public and private,” he has more than lived up to the challenge he set himself. It would be hard to imagine how the history of any single Jesuit province’s enterprise could be any more carefully and interestingly portrayed. To Dr. Alden, too, we owe heartfelt thanks. I do not know whether he had this in mind when he published the book, but he has presented the Portuguese Province with a splendid present for its 450th birthday anniversary in 1996.

Lest you think that the story told in *The Making of an Enterprise* is all solemnity and generality, let me assure you that the particular, the piquant, and the human detail are appropriately evident. To note just two instances: swimming and tobacco. It was not our more recent generals who first concerned themselves with the former detail. Aquaviva wanted it stopped in India, but Valignano in 1586 replied that it was a very hot country and at best the Jesuits only took “an occasional discreet dip in a stream.” As for the use of tobacco, generals from Vitelleschi to Nickel discouraged or forbade it. The former described it as “pernicious to body and soul,” and under Carafa “violators were threatened with public flagellation for the length of a *De profundis*.” But a Jesuit household account of the 1750s shows that one superior of the professed house in Goa may have had a very considerable habit—“as much as 1.8 kilograms [almost 4 pounds] a month.” Oh, for the good old days!

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*  
*Editor*

Martin E. Palmer, S.J.

**On Giving the Spiritual Exercises  
The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories  
and the Official Directory of 1599**

Granted that the basic manual for giving the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius was always the book of the Exercises itself, Ignatius, his associates, and their successors all realized that on many points fuller explanation was needed. This need they met with the Directories translated by Fr. Palmer in this book.

It gives us all the supplementary guidelines for giving the Exercises which derive from St. Ignatius and other 16th-century Jesuits. Much of the material survived only in manuscript form until the last century, and appears here in English for the first time. The documents range from a simple page of notes by St. Peter Canisius to a full-scale handbook by Ignatius's Secretary and long-time collaborator, Juan de Polanco. The book concludes with a fresh translation of the comprehensive *Directory to the Spiritual Exercises* published for the use of Jesuits in 1599, which served for over three centuries as the official guidebook to giving the Exercises.

For those involved with today's rapid growth in individually directed Ignatian retreats, these texts offer unparalleled insight into the original practice of the Exercises under St. Ignatius and his associates. Spiritual directors, retreat directors, and students of the Spiritual Exercises as well as of religious thought in general will not want to be without this book.

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# PREACHING BIBLICAL JUSTICE

## *To Nurture the Faith That Does It*

### Preachers by Vocation

**T**hough we do not call ourselves the Order of Preachers (an elder brother already bears that name), we have been an order of preachers from our beginnings. After his own adult conversion, Ignatius's first and constant impulse was to engage others in what has been called the conversational word of God, a kind of informal, one-on-one preaching. Later, when the ten companions of Paris put together their mission statement, the *Formula of the Institute*, in their description of the means by which they would "propagate and defend the faith and help souls progress in Christian life and doctrine," they placed public preaching at the head of the list. Even after the energies of the early Society were deeply engaged in the ministry of the schools, preaching continued to be a prominent ministry. John O'Malley's résumé of this activity sketches a picture of the early Jesuits (brothers and scholastics as well as priests) preaching at every opportunity: "in public squares and markets, in hospitals, in prisons, aboard ships in dock, in fortresses, on playing fields, in hospices or hostels, in confraternities."<sup>1</sup>

The better to move their audiences, scholastics were asked to study the classic rhetoricians and the best that the current literary curriculum had to offer. Indeed, Peter Canisius could write in 1548 that the principal reason for the years of study enjoined upon members of the Society was to make

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<sup>1</sup> John W. O'Malley, S.J., sketches the range of preaching in the early Society in "Ministries of the Word of God," chapter 3 of *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1993), 91-104.

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them effective preachers. The purpose was not so much to instruct as to move to conversion. And the content was the word of God, the word not only as mediated by Scripture and tradition but also as the fruit of experience and prayer. We are aware that the Jesuit churches of the Baroque period, with elaborate pulpits distant from the altar but much closer to the congregation, were designed especially with an eye (and an ear) to preaching. And we know that we stand in a tradition of famous preachers, ranging from the likes of Paolo Segneri, sometimes dubbed the John Wesley of the seventeenth century, who for twenty-seven years walked barefoot some eight hundred miles a year preaching from village to village in central Italy,<sup>2</sup> to our contemporary, Walter Burghardt, the sole Roman Catholic named in a recent list of the dozen best preachers in English.<sup>3</sup> While we Jesuits still benefit from a reputation as preachers who bring care and intelligence into the pulpit, it seems to me that for the most part we have overlooked an opportunity for growth in this ministry—the preaching of justice.

At General Congregation 34, we Jesuits roundly recommitted ourselves to the promotion of justice as an integral part of our mission today. However difficult it may be for some of us to understand how to implement that aspect of our mission in our ordinary work, the fact is that most of us (the priests among us) are ordained to preach. I suggest that right there, in that privileged moment of the ministry of the word—preaching—we have a powerful opportunity to nurture the faith that does justice. I suggest further that when we grasp the full range of the *biblical* theme of justice, the Scriptures open themselves in some fresh ways that will help us to both console and challenge those with whom we share that word.

## Our Situation as Preachers

**T**he current challenge to preach justice invites us to reflect afresh on our role as preachers. We do something amazing in that pulpit: we claim that these ancient documents, written two to three thousand

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<sup>2</sup> William V. Bangert, S.J., *A History of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972), 191.

<sup>3</sup> I should mention here that it was my participation as a member of the team on several of Father Walter Burghardt's "Preaching the Just Word" retreats that occasioned much of the reflection contained in this essay. "Preaching the Just Word" is a five-day retreat/workshop to help preachers integrate the social teaching of the Church into their weekend homily. For further information on this program, contact Rev. Ray Kemp, Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057; tele. [202] 687-3532; fax [202] 687-5835.



years ago in cultures quite different from our own, hold the key to the meaning of our contemporary lives. We base this claim on the conviction that there is a continuity between Israel's experience of God, the early Christians' experience of that same God in Jesus of Nazareth, and our ordinary lives as U.S. Catholics at the end of the second millennium. When we do this, we step into a long and venerable stream of interpretation that could be sketched as follows:

1. The work of Israelite song writers, sages, archivists, prophets, priests, lawmakers, and editors (some twelve hundred years)
2. The words and work of Jesus—Jewish layperson, prophet, reformer, Messiah! Son of God!—(one to three years)
3. The early church documents we call the New Testament (some seventy years)
4. Patristic writings, especially Augustine (four hundred years)
5. The medieval tradition, culminating powerfully in the synthesis of Aquinas (eight hundred years)
6. The Scholastic tradition, and
7. The special contribution made by the magisterium during the past century (papal, conciliar, and episcopal)

We dare—because we have been sacramentally mandated so to dare—to stand in that stream of interpretation and declare what the readings of the day have to say to this present community. We publicly interpret that ancient tradition in order to understand life, God, and the world and to proclaim what that interpretation means for us as we move through today and tomorrow.

This situation makes the preacher of the Sunday-morning homily the most important interpreter of Scripture. I don't mean to imply that we outclass the Pope and the bishops as teachers in the Church. I mean, rather, to underscore the simple fact that our congregations hear the Bible interpreted mainly on Sundays, which means that we who preach are *de facto* the most important interpreters of Scripture in their lives.

If many of us are not entirely at home in this role, we have good reasons for this discomfort. The biblical homily was not part of the culture in which most of us were raised. When I was growing up, Protestant ministers preached Scripture; Catholic priests preached doctrine. The fruits of the renaissance of biblical study, spurred by *Divino afflante Spiritu* in 1943, have only slowly been assimilated into seminary curricula and accessible

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commentaries.<sup>4</sup> Only in the past thirty years has this scholarship really begun to influence the language of church documents and catechetical tools. Most priests take only a handful of biblical courses and, in many cases, they usually live out a professional self-image that does not include regular Scripture study as part of their regular duties.

Meanwhile, even as we struggle to find our way as preachers, the nature of the homily itself continues to evolve: Vatican II mandated a change from the preconiliar sermon, typically a scholastic discourse on moral theology, to the specifically biblical homily, an application of the Scripture readings of the day. The council authorized an expanded lectionary with its rich and, for many, unfamiliar abundance of Old and New Testament readings. Moreover, some have noted a shift from preaching that “stands in Scripture and addresses the world” (kerygmatic) to preaching that “stands in the world” and listens to the word of God from there (the perspective of spiritual theology).<sup>5</sup>

There are further complexities, deriving both from content and from audience. We who preach face a double pressure. On the one hand, we are called to preach a challenging Gospel message: God’s love for us as revealed especially in his Son Jesus, calling for our love of God and neighbor (including enemies)—all of this as mediated by the magisterium of our Church, which has spoken powerfully on violence, racism, sexism, militarism, abortion, the death penalty, economic injustice, and ecological abuse.

On the other hand, we have a healthy fear of bringing partisan politics into the pulpit and of “laying a guilt trip” on an already burdened people who rightly yearn to hear good news. We fear turning off congregations already sorely distracted by the concerns of earning a living, paying the bills, raising the kids, caring for aging parents. None of us wants to risk sounding as if we belonged to the fictional parish that Garrison Keillor, of National Public Radio’s *Prairie Home Companion*, gently calls “Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility.”

Is there a way of meeting the first challenge (preaching justice) that does not founder on the rocks of the second reality? I think so. I am convinced that if we really preach the full range of *biblical* justice, we can challenge without laying a fresh burden on the overburdened. Nor need we

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<sup>4</sup> Those trained in the 1950s will recall being introduced to the new scholarship on Jesus’ life by Bruce Vawter’s *A Popular Explanation of the Four Gospels* (1955), followed the next year by John L. McKenzie’s introduction to the Old Testament, *The Two-Edged Sword*.

<sup>5</sup> This distinction is noted by Joseph Tetlow, S.J., in his introduction to Ernest Ferlita, S.J., *Paths of Life*, Cycle A (New York: Alba House, 1992), xv–xviii.

violate the integrity of the liturgical situation. Rightly done, preaching biblical justice will feed a deep hunger, heal some real wounds—and, yes, lead to a deeper sense of our responsibility as believing citizens called to act lovingly in an unjust world.

We live at a time when our nation is badly divided by fear of violence (domestic, urban, and international), by differing strategies for combating abortion, by a growing gap between rich and poor, by a still-active racism, by different understandings about how our faith connects with our citizenship, and by a cultural individualism that puts special interests before the common good. In the face of these numbing divisions and fears, the good news is that in our Gospel-based tradition of Catholic social teaching, we have a *wisdom* to share among ourselves and with the world around us. Clearly and vividly articulated in the ordinary course of our preaching, that vision can provide a sense of hope and direction that stirs up new energy. I am convinced that it is possible to share this wisdom in a way that can liberate rather than intimidate, energize rather than enervate, a way that takes a firm gospel stand without indulging in partisan politics.

I try here to spell that out in four movements. First, I briefly review the story of my own efforts to respond to the faith-justice mandate of the last three general congregations and demonstrate how those efforts have affected my preaching. Second, I sketch what I understand to be the scope of *biblical justice*. Third, I take the risk of reviewing samples of my own homiletic efforts as a way of reflecting on the process of *preaching* biblical justice. And fourth, I offer what I hope are some practical suggestions for preaching biblical justice.<sup>6</sup> (Readers in a hurry are encouraged to move right to part 4.)

## Four Movements toward Preaching Biblical Justice

### 1. One Part-Time Preacher's Story

Like many of us, I am a full-time teacher and a part-time preacher. In my case, the first activity has impacted the second significantly. Since many North American Jesuits working in our schools have expressed difficulty in integrating the famous Decree 4 of GC 32 (“Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice”) into their working lives, it may be helpful to sketch briefly how I, a university professor, have tried

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<sup>6</sup> Ideas that provide the seeds for the second and fourth parts found earlier expression in my “Preaching Biblical Justice,” *Church* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 17–21.

to make sense of the mandate to serve the faith in a way that includes the promotion of social justice.

When the published decrees of GC 32 hit our mailboxes in the summer of 1975, I was busy trying to complete a dissertation in New Testament studies. I was young enough (still thirtysomething) to read those documents with considerable excitement. I had no trouble assenting to the vision sketched by Decree 4: the earlier prophetic communications of Father Arrupe regarding our mission had prepared me well to receive it.<sup>7</sup> But if that description of our mission today made eminent sense, how I was to implement it in academe required another step, taking me beyond assent.

That summer, world hunger was much in the news. Here, it seemed to me, was a social-justice issue that, like the Vietnam War, posed an educational challenge as great as a political one. Most people, when confronted with pictures of children with bloated bellies and statistics on population growth and the depletion of arable land, simply go numb. “What can I do?” they ask themselves. “What’s the connection between these hungry millions and my own capacity to act in this world?” Clearly, like the recent war, this was an issue of *understanding* and *imagination* even before it was a question of political strategy. In short, it was something that I could address precisely as an educator.

Fortunately, I was just beginning my career as a college teacher in a theology department still small and flexible. I designed a biblically based course called “Faith and Food.” It was an exercise in collective contemplation upon the phenomenon of what I called *homo edens*, the human person as eater. We worked literally from the ground up. Beginning with the question “How does earth become food?” we pooled our knowledge of chemistry and biology regarding soil formation, the carbon cycle, photosynthesis, and all that. Moving on to ask, “How does food become us?” we reviewed, or learned for the first time, the physiology of digestion and assimilation. Then we took a cross-cultural look at the place of meals in human culture, which led easily to some exercises in journaling about their

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<sup>7</sup> For a critique of the justice language of Decree 4 of GC 32, see Martin R. Tripole, S.J., *Faith beyond Justice: Widening the Perspective* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit sources, 1994); and “The Roots of Faith-and-Justice,” *Review for Religious* 54, no. 5 (September/October, 1995): 646–65. Whatever imprecisions Decree 4 may contain, I need to say that, read against the decree’s expressed framework—namely *The Spiritual Exercises*, *The Formula of the Institute*, and *The Constitutions*—the urgent message of that decree regarding the social-justice dimension of our mission today has always made good sense to me as it stands. In what follows, I find myself in accord with the discussion of these issues in Séamus Murphy, S.J., “The Many Ways of Justice,” *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 21/2 (1994).

own food life. Indeed, one of the main activities during the first quarter was to make at least three journal reflections per week on some food-related topic, either directly from the students' personal social experience or from something they met in the print or electronic media. (The students soon came to realize that virtually everything in their family and social life was related to eating and drinking, and that a surprising number of political and economic events are linked to land use and food-driven economies.)

Meanwhile, we toured Scripture, tracking themes like food as fellow creature, food as component of worship, food as a factor in social justice, the continuity between Passover and Eucharist, the table fellowship of Jesus, Jesus' food and farm stories, and table-fellowship and worship issues in the Christian community of Corinth.

During the second half of the semester, we focused on such contemporary food-related justice issues as land use in Latin America, food policies sponsored by the federal government, the plight of the family farm in the United States. During this quarter, each student was required to follow a particular food-related justice issue visible in media reports of current events, asking these questions: What decisions have been made? What values do these decisions promote? Are these decisions just? If not, how might justice be better served?

My efforts at locating the human person as eater in the fullest possible context gave rise to a vision of our place in the universe that I tried to elaborate with my students. Since it relates to the Christian understanding of creation that undergirds much of our vision of justice, I'll share part of that vision here.

The Sun, in its spectacular long-range burn-out (it is about halfway through a ten-billion-year process), sends most of its energy into a sink, the cool darkness of the universe. Only one-billionth of the Sun's total radiation is intercepted by Earth. All forms of life on Earth live by virtue of solar energy. But we—the most complex form of life in the solar system!—have no way of using the Sun's energy directly. We can absorb the makings of a little vitamin D by letting the Sun shine on our skin, but that's it. The only trap we have on this planet for capturing and reversing the Sun's entropy is the chlorophyll of green plants. Thanks to the chlorophyll they contain, green plants, alone among the biotic community, can do photosynthesis. Thus, out of that one-billionth of the Sun's radiation that Earth intercepts, the chlorophyll of Earth's plants uses one-tenth of one percent and turns it into the basis for all life here in our little ecological community of plants, animals, and us. That is a good reminder of the biblical teaching that the green plants, which are the source, directly or indirectly, of all we eat, are fellow creatures, not human artifacts. It is not mere wordplay to say that when I

eat an apple I am eating sunlight. I consume some of the energy of the Sun trapped by the apple tree's green leaves.<sup>8</sup>

But there are further mysteries to contemplate here. The apple not only fuels me; it becomes me. As the German proverb puts it, "*Man ist was man ißt*" (you are what you eat). My body, with little help from my intelligence, has ways to turn the substance of the apple into the substance of me. The fascinating explanations of the physiology of digestion give insight into these mysteries. Through food, the energy of the Sun and the stuff of Earth become me and fuel what I have become to perform actions of knowing and loving.

What this kind of reflection brings home is that our eating is perhaps our most naturally religious activity. In that activity we come to know ourselves as creatures, dependent upon a Power greater than ourselves for existence and sustenance. And around shared food, the meal, we come to know one another as brothers and sisters, sharing a common dependency upon one another and upon God.

These few paragraphs only begin to express our situation as *homo edens*, but they are perhaps enough to illustrate how attention to our place in the universe as human eaters illuminates the truth of the magisterial teaching on the common good; namely, that the goods of the earth exist first of all to meet the needs of all. In this moral vision, the substance of the land is the prime analogate. Attention to food calls our attention to land, which immediately highlights the social-justice questions arising from patterns of land ownership and use. For example, the students came to realize that only a few wealthy families owned most of the land in El Salvador and chose to use it mainly for growing cash crops for export rather than for growing the staples needed by the local population. This awareness helped them to understand why there have been peasant revolutions in that country. Students who had never given a thought to farm issues and international relations discovered that simply by following a chain of reflections beginning with eating, plants, and land, they were finding themselves to be intimately connected to events and issues of justice that once had seemed arcane and numbingly remote.

Well, involvement in this course also transformed my own awareness and thinking. It helped me appreciate the Thomist tradition regarding the place of creation in moral reasoning. It prepared me to appreciate the

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<sup>8</sup> While this reflection draws on scientific commonplaces, for this way of thinking about energy in the solar system I am especially indebted to Medard Gabel, *Hoping: Food for Everyone: Strategies to Eliminate Hunger* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1979), 16–21.

contribution of the U.S. Catholic bishops' letter on the U.S. economy, *Economic Justice for All*. It helped me see the pertinence of the past century's papal writing that we sum up with the phrase Catholic Social Teaching. Eventually, it persuaded one as illiterate in economics as I to peruse the business section of the daily paper on occasion, to work nine years on the board of a local peace-and-justice education center, and even to serve for a time on our Archdiocesan Rural Life Commission.

That, in short, is how reading Decree 4 twenty years ago got me to try to serve faith and promote justice as a university educator. Meanwhile, something was happening to my preaching. That curricular effort to read and teach the biblical traditions in the light of food-related justice issues helped me to hear unexpected resonances between the lectionary readings and social-justice issues current at the moment of a particular preaching assignment. These were the years marred by the assassination of Oscar Romero, the rape and murder of the church women in El Salvador, and the exposure of U.S. complicity in other violence in Latin America. Our bishops were engaging the U.S. church in a grass-roots consultation and teaching process that issued in *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) and *Economic Justice for All* (1986). The ongoing effort of relating the biblical traditions to current issues in the faith-and-food course was awakening me to the connections between and among peace-and-justice issues, our tradition of Catholic social teaching, and the lectionary readings of the day. A synthetic sense of biblical justice began to emerge, which I'll try to summarize here.

## 2. Biblical Justice

**The court, the classroom, and the Bible:** Before we consider the biblical notions of justice, it helps realize at the start that the justice-talk of the Bible differs from the more philosophical justice language that we have learned in the classroom and the courtroom. And yet, though the biblical and philosophical notions are indeed different in origin, they have long been wedded in Catholic social teaching.

The more familiar and conventional meaning of justice (the language of courts and classrooms) derives not from Scripture but from the classical philosophical tradition that has come down to us from ancient Greece and Rome. The essence of that classic philosophical notion of justice has been caught handily in the Latin tag *suum cuique reddere* (to render to each his or her due). Spelling out what is due, of course, requires an analysis of rights and consequent duties. *Biblical* justice includes the concerns expressed in that classic philosophical notion, but sets them in a fuller context. The main biblical vocabulary of justice—*ṣedāqāh* in the Hebrew and *δικαιοσύνη* in

Greek—refers to a right ordering of relationships, first the God/human relationship and second the human-to-human. A phrase that captures the wider context of biblical justice is *fidelity to the demands of covenant relationships*.<sup>9</sup> The foundation of the biblical understanding of justice is the faith claim that God and humanity are bonded in a set of relationships imaged as covenant.

All the considerations entailed in the philosophers' *suum cuique* can find a home in the biblical notion of justice, but the scope of biblical justice is much more inclusive. The biblical vision sees all social relationships in the context of a communal life shared with God. Whereas the classical philosophical tradition of justice works from a rational analysis of human nature and society, the biblical-justice tradition works from a vision of divine initiative creating and sustaining world and persons, and calling the persons to conduct their lives in response to that divine initiative. That entails honoring the Giver and sharing the gifts in love and gratitude. Necessarily, biblical justice is a summons to individual and communal conversion.

In the postbiblical tradition, obviously, the tools of classical philosophy have been useful for elaborating the details of what is implied behaviorally and legally in the living-out of the demands of covenant relationships. St. Thomas, using Aristotle's categories in his treatment of justice, does so from a biblical framework, that is, from the perspective of an order created and sustained by God. Biblical discourse on justice themes (in story, song, law, and prophecy) always moves in that larger world of living out the covenant in the human response to God's creating and redeeming initiative. Reflection on some specific biblical material may help clarify the scope of biblical justice.

**The Torah:** The primeval story of the human family, told in the first eleven chapters of Genesis as a prelude to the more specific story of Israel, pictures the relationships of biblical justice in a powerfully elemental way. Here we find the basic themes: *God* as giver of all, *persons* as part of the creature network, *food* as fellow creature, *humankind* as intimately involved with the earth (*'ādām* made from the *'adāmāh*; or earthling from earth, humanity from the humus), male and female together constituting the image of God, and humans as stewards (not owners) of Earth. The primeval

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<sup>9</sup> This formulation of biblical justice was argued cogently by John R. Donahue, S.J., "Perspectives on Biblical Justice," in *The Faith That Does Justice* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1977). See also by the same author, "What Does the Lord Require? A Bibliographical Essay on the Bible and Social Justice," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 25/2 (1993): 19–25. L. John Topel, S.J., *The Way of Peace: Liberation through the Bible* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979) also provides a helpful overview of the biblical treatment of justice.



history then proceeds to display five images of human violation of that divine/human relationship: Adam and Eve's rebellion, Cain's murder of his brother, the general arrogance and violence of Genesis 6 (v. 5: "the wickedness of humankind was great in the Earth"), Ham's disrespect of his father, and the technological arrogance of all people at Babel. Building on the traditions he has inherited, the sixth-century-B.C. priestly author of Genesis 9 presents God as renewing the covenant with "all flesh" already established in the bond arising from creation itself, a bond that has been called the cosmic covenant.<sup>10</sup> What the arrogance of the descendants of Noah undid, in the behavior symbolized by the Tower of Babel story (Genesis 11), God promises to mend through the covenant with Abram (Genesis 12). What looks at first to be a narrowing-down from the cosmic to the tribal turns out still to be universal in scope, for God promises that through Abram's descendants *all the families* of the earth will be blessed.

The Exodus story tells of God rescuing the Hebrews from the oppression of slavery and, through the Sinai covenant, making of them a bonded community, a community contrasting with the nations surrounding them. Consequently, the laws of the Hebrew Bible are not simply social legislation but a spelling-out of covenant relationships. Though many of the details of the Torah echo the legislation of their Near Eastern neighbors, Israel sees its community relationships as part of its life with God. Fidelity to the covenant relationships (justice, righteousness) is part of the Israelites' worship of the One who created, rescued, and sustains them as a people. Covenant justice is achieved in the structures of community life ensured by law. (We Christians have sometimes allowed Paul's critique of Pharisaic legalism to obscure the reality of the Jewish *simḥat hattôrāh* [rejoicing in the Law].)

**The prophets:** The main task of the prophets (especially Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Isaiah) was to call the people back to lives of covenant justice. For example, they diagnosed hunger as stemming from injustice, not scarcity. For the prophets, fidelity to the horizontal relationships of the

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<sup>10</sup> For the interpretation that Gen. 6:18 and 9:9 refer to the confirmation of a covenant already established in the original creation narrated in Gen. 1–2, see W. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1984); P. A. H. de Boer, "Quelques remarques sur l'arc dans la nuée (Génèse 9: 8–17)," in Brekelmans, *Questions disputées d'Ancien Testament: Méthode et théologie*, BETL 32 (Louvain: Leuven University, 1989): 105–14; and "Noah and Israel: The Everlasting Divine Covenant with Mankind," also in Brekelmans, *Questions*, 115–29. On cosmic covenant, see Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation* (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1992).

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covenant was so important that failure in this regard rendered worship vacuous (see, for example, Amos 5:21–24; Isa. 1:12–17, 58:6; or Jer. 7:1–11).

This vision of living out fidelity to the covenant relationships was rooted not only in salvation history (the experience of redemption from slavery in Egypt and, later, the rescue from the Babylonian exile); the ethics of Israel was also rooted in the very structures of creation. When, for example, Isaiah excoriates the elite of Israel for land grabbing and self-indulgence, he identifies their moral failure as the failure to see the created order for what it is: “Ah, you who rise early in the morning in pursuit of strong drink, who linger in the evening to be inflamed by wine, whose feasts consist of the lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine, but who do not regard the deeds of the Lord or see the work of his hands” (Isa. 5:11–13). Even more than the prophets, the sages of Israel rooted their sense of justice in a vision of creation. Consider this from Proverbs: “He who oppresses a helpless person insults his creator, but he who is kind to the needy honors him” (Prov. 14:31). Or this: “The poor person and the oppressor meet together; Yahweh gives light to the eyes of both” (Prov. 29:13).

The vision of the long-range future of God’s plan of justice comes to its fullest expression in prophetic visions during the Exile. Jeremiah (30–31), Ezekiel, and especially Second Isaiah (Isa. 40–55) teach the refugees to hope for a new creation consisting in a restored and renewed covenant and community. The inclusive covenant of creation would be implemented through Israel’s servant mission to be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6). Just as Yahweh had first fashioned his people in the process of liberation from slavery in Egypt, so now, through the instrumentality of his “anointed one” (the Persian Cyrus!), he was working a new creation in restoring his people to the land of Israel. Their challenge was to collaborate with this process of God’s re-creation. Part of Isaiah’s vision of God’s plan was the idea that Israel, as God’s servant, would not only restore the twelve tribes of the house of Jacob but would also fulfill the promise to Abraham and be a light to the nations.

**Jesus:** It is in Jesus of Nazareth, of course, that we Christians claim to have found the divine promise and project of biblical justice fulfilled. In his humanity a Torah-keeping layman, Jesus gathered around himself a tribal Twelve and called his people to a renewal of their living of the covenant relationships. Often people project a picture of Jesus as somehow above and beyond the Law. Indeed, he revoked the letter of the Torah regarding divorce and oaths and he extended love of neighbor to include the enemy. But he transgressed its precepts only when a ceremonial or Sabbath law impeded meeting a human need. Thus, he would eat with the unclean and heal on the Sabbath (technically, medical “work”). But when it came to the

essentials of the Torah and its moral and religious vision, he was a keeper of the Law, that guide to the covenant relationships.

After the death of the prophet John the Baptizer, Jesus embarked on his own prophetic activity. He seized upon the current apocalyptic symbol of the coming Kingdom of God and gave it his own mysterious turn. To respond to the Kingdom of God was to acknowledge that the ultimate authority in one's life was not the high priest, or the Hebrew tetrarch, or the Roman emperor, but "King" God, the Creator. To announce that the Kingdom of God was *coming* was to proclaim that the Reign of God the King was about to be manifested in a fresh way on this earth and, indeed, that Jesus' own ministry offered access to that new manifestation of God's saving power here and now. One responded to this news by *acting* in recognition of the reality that God—and not oneself or one's family or one's social group or any other group or person—was the final authority in one's life. That meant living a life of a renewed covenant that created a community of love (even love of enemies), nonviolence, forgiveness, and sharing of goods, since all things were finally gifts of the divine King.

The ethics implied in Jesus' preaching of Kingdom justice is especially evident in some of his parables. In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37), Jesus presents the compassionate outreach of a hated enemy of the people as an example of the fullness of Torah living. In the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), he presents a picture of a man who neglected to apply Isa. 58:6f. to himself and to recognize the beggar at his gate as his covenant brother. In the story about the Rich Landowner (Luke 12:16–21), Jesus gives a showcase example of a man who has allowed his wealth to lead him to disregard *all* the covenant relationships: with *Earth* (whose products are gifts to be shared, not a commodity to be hoarded), with the *community* (from which he has withdrawn, just like Howard Hughes, to grasp his possessions to himself), with *himself* (even his *ψυχή* is "on loan" from Another), and with *God* (whose surprising presence he has neglected in his interior monologue).

Jesus healed and delivered people from demonic power, and he interpreted these events as signs of the Reign of God already inaugurated (Luke 11:20). Healing the sick was not only a bringing to physical wholeness, it was a restoration to community of those on the margin. He shared meals with tax collectors and non-keepers of the Torah, even though doing so rendered him "unclean" in the eyes of his peers. He reached beyond all group loyalties to full human solidarity; for example, in his relationships with women, Samaritans, rich as well as poor, and even an occasional Gentile.

Though Jesus' call to live the fullness of biblical justice was accepted by some, mainly the marginal, it was misunderstood by many and radically rejected by some of the most powerful civil and religious authorities of his day, a rejection that led to the irregular trials and execution we commemorate during Holy Week.

**The Church:** The fresh divine initiative that the followers of Jesus experienced in the resurrection and the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit came to be recognized as a further inauguration of the Kingdom of God, enabling them to live the life of the covenant in forgiveness, healing, meeting of mutual needs, and outreach to the rest of the world. Understood this way, the whole Spirit-led life of the Christian community was an expression of biblical justice, the living-out of the relationships of the covenant community in worship and service, whereby those who had gave to those who did not have.

In this light, Luke is inspired to speak of the birth of the Church at Pentecost in terms of a reversal of the Tower of Babel episode. Whereas the arrogant rebellion symbolized in Genesis 11 had led to a confusion of tongues and a scattering of the people, now a joyful response to divine invitation leads to a gathering from many nations and people "confused" by the wonder of unexpected communication (Acts 2:1-12). Paul and Barnabas understand the mission of the servant Israel (as light to the nations) to be fulfilled in their own ministry to the Gentiles, empowered by the risen Lord Jesus (Acts 13:46-47, where they apply Isa. 49:6 to themselves; see also Acts 26:17-23). Thus, the Acts of the Apostles presents us with a powerful and perennially valid paradox: The Church is a "contrast society" mandated to *serve* the very world to which it provides a contrast.

When the apostle Paul uses justice language in his correspondence with fledgling Christian communities in places like Philippi, Galatia, and Rome, he echoes his Hebrew Scriptures by speaking first of divine initiative, God "justifying" (or "making right") sinners, who in turn are called to live lives of "righteousness" (*δικαιοσύνη*), that is, being faithful to the demands of those covenant relationships in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Whereas the synoptic evangelists stay with the Kingdom language of Jesus' preaching, Paul adapts to his Hellenistic readership by stressing life in the Holy Spirit. Both modes of discourse are ways of speaking about the bonded life of biblical justice, where the Creator and Redeemer initiates a renewed covenant through Jesus, and where Christian life—in all its relationships—is the response to that divine initiative.

**The postbiblical tradition:** The point of this quick trip through Scripture is to suggest how biblical justice saturates the entire sweep of the Bible. Understood in this way, biblical justice embraces and provides a fuller

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framework for our own preaching and teaching about contemporary social-justice issues. When Thomas Aquinas theologized in the thirteenth century about biblical justice, he employed the classical philosophical categories of Aristotle to analyze justice into its various aspects, for example, in commutative (person-to-person) and distributive (group-to-persons) justice, and to elaborate his understanding of rights and duties.

The experience and reflection of the past century and a half has helped us see how the very (human-made) *structures of society* can be just or unjust and that there is a *social* justice that calls citizens to change unjust structures, the better to serve the common good. The current expression of Catholic social teaching has it that at the heart of a biblically informed vision of justice is *the dignity of the person participating in community*. A corollary is that the dignity of the person is fostered only when the structures of society have as their goal *the common good*—the sum of all those social goods that sustain the dignity of all persons in the community. This may seem like an obvious understanding and vision, but it is not that of the secular culture that surrounds us, which cultivates an individualism prizing individual freedom more than the common good. Recently, the experience of the church in Latin America has called attention to the biblical mandate for a preferential option for the poor—a concept now embraced by the universal magisterium of the Church.

The postbiblical development of justice talk is consonant with its biblical roots. In the end, however, it is the biblical meaning that provides the fullest context for understanding the subsequent tradition about justice. Informed preaching on biblical justice, in the manner urged by our bishops in *Communities of Salt and Light*, will help us live out faithfully those demands of the covenant relationship with God, others, and the rest of creation.

For us Christians, then, justice is more than simply “being fair.” It is nothing less than living in community with the Creator and all other creatures, ready to share the gifts of life in the Spirit of Jesus. As *Roman Catholic* Christians, we share a tradition that spells out powerfully what it means in practice to be faithful to this ancient and renewed covenant. In our Jesuit documents we sometimes use the more classical language of postbiblical theology, for instance, joining “promotion of justice” with “the service of faith” to embrace the full range of the covenantal notion of biblical justice; at other times, for example in Decree 2 of GC 34, “Servants of Christ’s Mission,” we refer more explicitly to *biblical* justice, as in this sentence from paragraph 13 of that document: “From faith comes the justice willed by God, the entry of the human family into peace with God and with one another.”

### 3. Preaching Biblical Justice: Some Sample Efforts

What follows are some of my own attempts at preaching biblical justice when the readings of the day make it appropriate. In virtually every case, the congregation addressed by these homilies is the community of the 11:30 A.M. Sunday Eucharist at St. John's Church, Omaha, Nebraska. Typically, they are a mix of Creighton University students and some who regularly come from all over Omaha. St. John's is, informally and de facto, a nonterritorial parish of people who choose to come to this church because they are drawn to the liturgy and community here.

While not all of my homilies highlight justice-related themes, I was surprised to discover, as I browsed through those Sunday sermons that I have archived on hard and floppy disks, how many of them found a justice connection. I take the risk of displaying a handful of them here because, for better or worse, they provide concrete examples that at least suggest what I am talking about. One person's fumbling efforts often inspire another to do the same thing better.

I have chosen five specimens. Two take up specific issues prompted by current events (the death penalty and the prospect of war). The next two explore connections between liturgical feasts (Christ the King and Palm Sunday) and the peace-and-justice ministry of the Church. A final example focuses on some justice implications of a familiar image (the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world).

#### *An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind*

The Seventh Sunday of the Year (February 18, 1996)

Readings: Lev. 19:1f., 17f.; 1 Cor. 3:16-23; Matt. 5:38-48 (Love your enemies.)

Did that gospel reading make you flinch?

I think we just heard the toughest—and most liberating—part of Jesus' moral teaching. It was challenging two thousand years ago; it still makes us squirm today. And yet, these passages—Jesus' teaching on nonviolence and love of enemies—are the very words that inspired Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. They moved Gandhi to the nonviolent actions that resisted British oppression in India; they moved King to the boycotts and sit-ins that began to reverse legalized racism here in the United States. Today I hear this teaching of Jesus challenging us regarding another issue very much in the air, the death penalty.

Listen to the voice of a woman quoted recently on a *New York Times*' report on capital punishment. Anne Coleman spoke recently against

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an execution. She got a phone call from someone who asked her how she would feel if her son had been killed. Mrs. Coleman responded, “My daughter was murdered. Does that count?” Her daughter Frances was murdered at age 24, leaving behind a two-year-old daughter. Mrs. Coleman is a member of a group called Murder Victims’ Families for Reconciliation. The group is precisely what their name describes. Each member has lost a loved one through murder and does not want the state to kill the person who did the killing. The group is about twenty years old now and numbers some three thousand.

How do people in that situation get to think that way? You will recognize that their position is not a spontaneous human emotion. The more usual response to the murder of a family member is desire for revenge. Most of these folks are in that group; but they are working for the abolition of capital punishment, because their following of Jesus has led them to that place—and it was not just the *teaching* of Jesus but his reconciling grace.

Let’s look at the gospel reading again. Jesus says, “You have heard the commandment, ‘An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.’” Stop right there for a second. That Israelite principle—an eye for an eye—was already a *mitigation* of violence. In a nomadic, tribal culture the standard operating procedure was vengeance, maximum retaliation: you injure my brother’s eye and I and my brother will come over and take out both of yours—maybe your whole head, if we can get away with it. So the eye-for-an-eye rule was meant to put a curb on vengeance. As their legal system evolved, the Israelites didn’t implement the rule literally and physically, but worked out a system of payment for damages. It wasn’t an unreasonable system.

But Jesus comes along to say that this quid-pro-quo system doesn’t begin to implement his vision of living the Kingdom. Legal procedure may be able to bring about some mitigation of violence, but his approach is to counter violence with creative nonviolence. What he offers in this regard is not some new rules but three startling examples of creative nonviolence. First, he says, if someone tries to shame you with a backhanded slap across the cheek, shock your insulter by offering the other cheek, showing him that you refuse to be shamed. Second, if your creditor is so unjustly oppressive that he takes you to court over your shirt, then hand over your coat, and stand there stark naked. Implication: the shocking nakedness that will result will expose his oppression; even the law in Exodus says a debtor gets to keep his coat (Exod. 22:26–27). Third example: if one of the occupying Roman soldiers insists that you carry his backpack for a mile, carry it two miles. Implication: you’ll break down some of the natural hostility between the locals and the occupying troops, and incidentally the soldier will be forced to break his own Roman law, which only allows him to enlist you as

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a caddie for one mile. The point of Jesus' examples: Meet violence and hostility with creative nonviolent action.

But before we get comfortable with that, the next step in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount goes even further: Love your enemies; pray for your persecutors. And the motivation Jesus offers for this is nothing less than the imitation of the Creator. Look at the Creator's distribution of the sunlight and the rain: these elements of nature nurture the bad guys along with the good, and they warm and wash and quench the thirst of the unjust as well as of the just. If you want to live the life of the Reign of God, then imitate God. Let your compassion be as inclusive as that of the Creator.

Anyone knows that such an attitude doesn't come naturally. It requires the healing of anger and resentment, the grace of forgiveness and reconciliation, the support of the Christian community. In our own time, reflection on Jesus' teaching about nonviolence and love of enemies has led the Church to a new attitude regarding the death penalty. Pope John Paul II has come out with stronger and stronger statements against the use of capital punishment (most formally in his March 1995 encyclical, "The Gospel of Life," saying that it is virtually never warranted; see section 56). Our own bishops have echoed that stand repeatedly, most recently in their November statement on political responsibility. I quote them:

The church's commitment to the value and dignity of human life leads us to oppose the use of the death penalty. We believe that a return to the use of the death penalty is further eroding respect for life in our society. We do not question society's right to protect itself, but we believe that there are better approaches to protecting our people from violent crimes. The application of the death penalty has been discriminatory toward the poor, the indigent and racial minorities. Our society should reject the death penalty to seek methods of dealing with violent crime that are more consistent with the Gospel visions of respect for life and Christ's message of healing love.<sup>11</sup>

They also observe elsewhere that it has not been demonstrated that the death penalty acts as a deterrent. Our own state of Nebraska, like most others, is reviewing the death-penalty laws. Currently the forty-nine legislators in the Unicameral stand this way: twenty-seven senators in favor of the death penalty, nine opposed, and thirteen either undecided or unwilling to answer. Those of us who find it in our conscience to move with our Church's application of Jesus' teaching on this issue clearly have some work to do.

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<sup>11</sup> *Origins* 25, no. 22 (Nov. 16, 1995): 377.



Two suggestions: (1) See the film *Dead Man Walking* and discuss it with your friends. It is about the work of Sister Helen Prejean, C.S.J., with convicts on death row and with their families and the families of their victims. It's a gripping movie and it'll make you proud of the Church and stir your heart and mind. You'll also be glad there is another image of a nun out there in the media besides Whoopi Goldberg in *Sister Act II* (fun though that one may be). (2) You might want to join a prayer service occurring a week from next Friday in a church near you. It is called "Abolition 2000." The point is to pray for the abolition of the death penalty by the year 2000. Services are scheduled at noon, Friday March 1, at St. Cecilia's for those in Douglas County and at St. Mary's for Sarpy County (there will be reminders in the newspapers as the time approaches).

Mrs. Coleman wears a T-shirt with the saying, "An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Go Blind." I think Jesus agrees.

Some afterthoughts. Obviously, the Gospel reading was open to a number of applications. At the moment, capital punishment was very much in the air. We had a "pro-life" state Attorney General working strenuously to carry out the executions of the men on Nebraska's death row. The memory was still fresh of a nasty counterdemonstration ("Fry Willy!") clashing with a prayer vigil service on the occasion of an execution here last year. Sentiment was strong for lethal reprisal against those responsible for the killing of a popular young police officer here last fall. There was much more that could have been said regarding the magisterium on capital punishment (the USCC statement of 1980; the treatment in the Catechism of the Catholic Church; the context of a consistent ethic of life). But it seemed best to give at least equal time to an explication of the gospel text. It seemed to work. An unusual number of parishioners thanked me for the homily after Mass. One was a man who said he had to admit he didn't agree with the Church on this issue, that he had known so-and-so (here he named a well-known person executed for murder) and felt he deserved to die; and that he himself was the survivor of a stabbing and had some strong feelings about what should be done with violent criminals. Nonetheless, he thanked me for "the hard words," gave me his name and asked for prayers.

The Gulf War—including the debate preceding our engagement with Iraq and the public response to our involvement—provided several months during which it seemed, at least to this homilist, that here was an issue of public policy that demanded some treatment from the pulpit.

The next example comes from a moment when the prospect of military confrontation in the Persian Gulf was much on our minds. Though the example is, at this writing, six years old, it touches on an issue of conscience that recurs frequently in our lives as Catholic

citizens of a powerful nation, and about which our Church has taught in a powerfully countercultural way.

### *Regarding War: Who Is Your Teacher?*

The Thirty-first Sunday of the Year (November 4, 1990)

Readings: Mal. 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10; 1 Thes. 2:7b-9, 13; Matt. 23:1-12

(They do not practice what they preach.)

The scribes and the Pharisees have succeeded Moses. Do as they say, not as they do. Why would Jesus want to allow so much authority to the Pharisees? And why would he spend so much energy criticizing their behavior? Scholars now pretty much agree that the words we hear in today's Gospel are not those of Jesus addressing his contemporaries but the words of the church of Matthew addressing a situation at least fifty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The situation was this. Ten years after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, the leadership of Judaism met in the city of Jamnia in A.D. 85. One of the actions they took was to introduce into the synagogue prayer service a curse against the *minim*, the Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, the Jews for Jesus. So most Jewish Christians began to acknowledge that their Christian faith separated them from the Jewish community. There were other Jewish Christians, however, who continued to think of themselves as Jewish. (Apparently, some of these people were in Matthew's community.) The question for them was: If I am a Jew who is a Christian, and I still think of myself as Jewish, how do I relate to the Jewish authorities who now want people like me out of the synagogue? One answer to that question is what we hear in today's gospel reading: Observe what they tell you (that is, about the meaning of the Torah and so on), but don't imitate their behavior.

We later, mostly Gentile, Christians often take that verse from Matthew and apply it to the various authorities of our lives, often with this sense: Even though you've got your disagreements, follow the legitimate authority figures in your life. As a general rule that makes good sense in our ordinary daily dealings with our bosses, our civil and religious authorities. But there is another verse in the reading that introduces another dimension. Verse 10 reads: "Avoid being called teachers. Only one is your teacher, the Messiah." One of the implications of that verse is that our informed conscience, responding to the teaching of Jesus, is the main authority of our Christian lives. Nineteen centuries of Christian experience have provided plenty of examples of occasions when one can experience a genuine conflict

between civil authority and informed Christian conscience. Our Church's position regarding the immorality of abortion is one such example.

But there is another situation developing that calls for a similar formation of our Christian conscience in the face of the public policy of our civil authorities. Both the Chair of the Armed Services Committee and the Air Force Chief of Staff have been hinting at the possibility of bombing Baghdad. Think about it. Baghdad is a city about the size of Boston, with museums, shops, places of worship, old ladies, kids, young women—less than the usual number of young men though, because they lost some 200,000 in the war against Iran.

It is time to recall that our Church has spoken clearly on the matter of the bombing of cities. To quote one such teaching, from Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," "Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation."<sup>12</sup> That has to do with the bombing of cities. What about military strikes that would try to spare civilians? Does the situation in the Gulf satisfy the traditional criteria for a just war? Run the criteria through your mind: just cause, comparative justice, right intention, last resort, probability of success, proportionality. Let me now read two paragraphs from our U.S. bishops in 1983 regarding the formation of conscience in these matters.

In this connection we reiterate the position we took in 1980. Catholic teaching does not question the right in principle of a government to require military service of its citizens provided the government shows it is necessary. A citizen may not casually disregard his country's conscientious decision to call its citizens to acts of "legitimate defense." Moreover, the role of Christian citizens in the armed forces is a service to the common good and an exercise of the virtue of patriotism, so long as they fulfill this role within defined moral norms.

At the same time, no state may demand blind obedience. Our 1980 statement urged the government to present convincing reasons for draft registration, and opposed reinstatement of conscription itself except in the case of a national defense emergency. Moreover, it reiterated our support for conscientious objection in general and for selective conscientious objection to participation in a particular war, either because of the ends being pursued or the means being used. We called selective conscientious objection a moral conclusion which can be validly derived from the classical teaching of just-war principles. We continue to insist upon respect for and

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<sup>12</sup> "Gaudium et spes," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: Guild Press, Angelus Book, 1966), §80 (p. 284).

legislative protection of the rights of both classes of conscientious objectors. We also approve requiring alternative service to the community—not related to military needs—by such persons.

Maybe our best framework for thinking about this is a verse we heard today from Malachi: “Have we not all the one Father? Has not the one God created us?” Let’s keep all of this in mind and heart as we continue to reflect on what our civil authorities do in our name and on what we choose to do in the name of our government. In the end, we have one teacher, Jesus Christ, and our best understanding of that teaching: our own conscience informed by the tradition and reflection of our Church.

### *Do Americans Need a King?*

Christ the King (November 26, 1995)

Readings: 2 Sam. 5:1-3; Col. 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43

(There was also an inscription over him: “This is the king of the Jews.”)

We U.S. Americans don’t put great stock in king-talk. We are, after all, children of a revolution against British royalty, just a little over two centuries ago. And for us today, royalty is matter for talk shows and tabloids. But the amazing and unexpected kingship of Jesus was something the gospel writers took very seriously. And, ever since, the Church, with very good reason, has continued the tradition.

Each of the evangelists has his own way of describing the crucifixion, the last words, and the death of Jesus. But they are alike in insisting that the death (and resurrection) of Jesus shows him to be king in a way nobody expected. And Luke, in today’s gospel reading, is the most insistent of all.

We read how Jesus is taunted from all sides, and every word plays on the idea of kingship. The religious officials say, “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God.” Where does this kind of talk come from? The sort of Messiah, or Anointed One, that most people of Judea were expecting was a king like David, as today’s first reading celebrates that monarch of Israel’s Golden Age. David had achieved peace and the unity of the twelve tribes through military power and political savvy. And for a few precious decades, the threat of surrounding empires was held at bay. Ever since that Golden Age, things had never been quite the same. After Solomon the breakup of the United Kingdom followed first, then the invasion of the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks. Now the Romans were in charge. The Messiah that most Israelites had hoped for was a king like David, who, through God-given

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military leadership and skillful political maneuvers, would save the people once again by restoring their autonomy and bringing about another age of peace.

So when the officials mock Jesus under the cross, they are imparting an ironic twist to this messianic expectation, meaning something like this: “The Messiah is supposed to save the people. Well, you might have been able to save a few from sickness with your healing, but let’s see you rescue yourself from this fix.” The soldiers express the same sentiment, but in more Roman terms: “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself.” It is here that Luke chooses to introduce the note, “Above him there was an inscription that read, ‘This is the King of the Jews’”—which is surely the evangelist’s way of pointing up the irony of their words. The language they use in mockery is, for Christian readers, wonderfully true. Jesus really *is* a king who saves, but not in the way people were expecting.

One of the bandits crucified with Jesus picks up the mocking refrain: “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” Then that famous other bandit has the grace, in the face of all that, to acknowledge Jesus’ kingship: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus says, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” It is interesting to know that “Paradise” is a Persian loanword for “royal garden.”

This last exchange might lead us for a moment to think that the kingship of Jesus has to do entirely with life after death. But the second part of Luke’s narrative, the Acts of the Apostles, makes it clear that the kingdom over which Jesus reigns as Risen Lord has very much to do with this world. Those in Jerusalem who come to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and Lord are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live in a new way that involves healing, nonviolence, worshiping in Jesus’ name, and the sharing of material goods “so that there [is] no needy person among them” (Acts 4:34, alluding to Deut. 15:4).

Our ending the church year today with the celebration of Christ the King, therefore, is no indulgence in some kind of royal nostalgia. It is a commitment to the Risen Lord Jesus as the one whose authority governs our lives in a way that transcends every other earthly authority, be it that of king, president, governor, boss, whatever. One day, when we die, that will have wonderful implications for life after death with the King and with people like the repentant bandit. Meanwhile, acknowledging Jesus’ ironic kingship has very practical implications for our ordinary lives right here in River City.

As an example of what I mean, listen to what our U.S. bishops had to say in a document they released last week. It is called “Political Responsi-

bility: Proclaiming the Gospel of Life, Protecting the Least among Us and Pursuing the Common Good.” (Notice how they squeeze their whole message into the title.) They have this to say:

Our community of faith does not rely on focus groups or polls to chart our directions; we advocate a consistent commitment to the human person. We draw our principles from Catholic teaching and tradition not partisan platforms or ideological agendas. We stand with the unborn and the undocumented when many politicians seem to be abandoning them. We defend children in the womb and on welfare. We oppose the violence of abortion and the vengeance of capital punishment. We oppose assault weapons on our streets and condoms in our schools. Our agenda is sometimes counter-cultural, but it reflects our consistent concern for human life.<sup>13</sup>

What the bishops are saying, in effect, is that following Christ the King is radically other-worldly and *this*-worldly at the same time. It is other-worldly in that we place our ultimate allegiance in an invisible authority, and we are called to act in ways that often counter the ways of the world around us (especially when they are violent and unjust). At the same time, following Christ the King is profoundly this-worldly, in that we work for the common good, to quote the bishops again, by “sharing our values, raising our voices and using our votes to shape a society more respectful of human life, human dignity and human rights.”

So celebrating Christ the King is far from being a nostalgia trip. It is a commitment to joining the King in establishing a Reign whose fulfillment still lies ahead. It’s time to start another church year.

Let us proceed with the Supper of our King.

Here, again, I saw the opportunity to help the parishioners see that an apparently outdated symbol—Christ as King—is just as meaningful as ever when we understand the evangelist’s take on that symbol. What’s more, from the beginning it has always had profound social implications. Jesus’ kingship is part and parcel of the idea of covenant, the very context of biblical justice. Here, as is frequently the case, *aggiornamento* is retrieval.

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<sup>13</sup> *Origins* 25, no. 22: 374.

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## A Clash of Symbols: The Ass Confronts the Palm Branches

Palm Sunday (March 31, 1996)

Please be seated. Instead of a homily *after* the reading of the Passion today, we'll take a moment now to reflect on what we commemorate this morning.

Usually preachers take this occasion to reflect on the contrast between the praise and adulation of the crowd *today* and fickle turn of the same crowd on *Friday*, when they allow themselves to be manipulated by the authorities into calling for Jesus' crucifixion. But there is another contrast that I'd like to highlight today. It is the contrast that the evangelists themselves are eager for us to contemplate. It is the contrast between the kind of king that the crowds take Jesus to be and the kind of king he understands himself to be. It all comes down to understanding the palms and the donkey.

First the palms. We only know about the palm branches from John's Gospel. (Matthew, Mark and Luke just mention branches.) And John makes much of those palm branches because of what they meant in the Jewish tradition. In a day when they didn't have a flag, palm branches were the symbol of Jewish nationalism. Palm branches reminded people of the days of the Maccabees, nearly two centuries before Christ. After Judas Maccabeus and his guerrilla fighters took back the temple from the Syrian oppressor, Antiochus IV, the people brought palm branches to the temple on the occasion of its rededication (the event still celebrated at Hanukkah). Ever since that event, palm branches had been a sign of Jewish nationalism.

This morning's paper describes the discovery of some Galilean coins struck around A.D. 24. They bear the image of Emperor Tiberius Caesar, but the coins have been re-struck with the image of a palm smack across the face of the Emperor—a political statement if there ever was one. So when the crowds came out to welcome Jesus with palm branches, it is clear that they welcomed him as a kind of political king in the tradition of the Maccabees—an “anointed one” who would lead a revolt against the Roman oppressors. But Jesus, to make it quite clear that he is not that kind of king, chooses to enter riding on a donkey. To illustrate the meaning of that choice, John's narrative *first* mentions the palm branches and *then* presents Jesus' decision to ride a donkey as a *response* to the waving of the palm branches. It is as if Jesus were saying, “You greet me with palm branches? You take me for another Maccabee? If you want me to be your king, then here's the kind of king I am. I'm the kind of king the prophet Zechariah spoke of, the one riding on an ass.” To help us understand the symbolism of the ass, Matthew

and John both quote the relevant passage from Zechariah 9:9. I'll quote it here along with the verse that follows:

Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See your king shall come to you; a just savior is he,

Meek and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass. He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem;

The warrior's bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations.

The palm branches showed that the crowd was looking for a king who would ride a war horse. Jesus' choice of the donkey showed that he was not that kind of Messiah.

As we hold these palm branches today, we can ask ourselves: What are we doing? Are we waving a sign of violence in the name of national security? Of course not. We mean something else by these branches. We acknowledge Jesus to be the kind of king signaled by the choice of the donkey—a king who chose a nonviolent path to peace, even if he himself had to suffer the violence of others.

I offer this scrap of homily to suggest that sometimes the most helpful thing a homilist can do is to deepen the congregation's awareness of the social significance of a primary image or symbol inherent in the feast day, especially when that feast is an annual feast with its own special character.

Sometimes what invites the connection with biblical justice is neither the feast nor a particular current event but simply a familiar symbol of the faith calling for a renewed appreciation. The final example attempts just that.

### *The Lamb Takes Away Sin? How? When?*

Second Sunday of the Year (January 14, 1996)

Readings: Isa. 49:3, 5f.; 1 Cor. 1:2f.; John 1:29–34 (Behold the Lamb of God.)

Have you ever noticed that John the Baptist seems to know a lot more in the fourth Gospel than he does in Matthew and Luke? In Matthew and Luke we learn of an incident when the Baptist, locked up in prison by Herod, sends some of his followers to Jesus with the question, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" He seems unsure in those Gospels, whereas in today's reading from the fourth Gospel we hear John the Baptist, right in the first chapter, say, "Look there! The Lamb of God



who takes away the sin of the world. It is he of whom I said: ‘After me is to come a man who ranks ahead of me, because he was before me.’”

So, according to Matthew and Luke, halfway into the public life of Jesus, John is still trying to figure Jesus out. But according to John the Evangelist, right from the start the Baptist knows about Jesus’ redemptive role (taking away the sin of the world) and even his preexistence as the eternal Son of God (he ranks ahead of me because he was before me). Which tradition is giving us the truth? Both. Matthew and Luke are likely giving us something close to John’s experience as it unfolded historically. The fourth Gospel, on the other hand, takes such a strong post-Easter point of view that it proclaims the full glory of the death and resurrection of Jesus in every chapter. So in this Gospel the Baptist is made to speak what the Christian community came to know only after Easter and Pentecost: Jesus, as crucified and risen Lord, does take away the sin of the world; what’s more, those who accept him in faith are being baptized in the Holy Spirit. And all of this resonates powerfully with a third claim, the one that thunders from this morning’s reading from Isaiah: “I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

Well, even though some of us are doing pretty well, it would be hard to convince victims of abuse and those still suffering from political oppression that Jesus has enlightened the nations, that salvation has reached the end of the world, that the sin of the world has been removed.

Let’s listen more closely to those readings to see if we are hearing them right.

That first reading comes from the prophet we call Second Isaiah, who preached to the Hebrew refugees during the sixth century B.C., when they were exiles in Babylon. That famous Servant figure stands both for the community of Israel and for a leader within Israel. The Servant is saying, in effect, “The Lord told me: ‘You are not only going to gather up the scattered tribes of Israel; but you, Israel, are going to be *le’ôr gôyîm*—a light to the nations.’” In other words, you are not only going to be saved, you are going to be an instrument of salvation for others, the whole rest of the world. Ever since, Jews have taken that prophecy as a portrait of their role in history; and Christians, from gospel times on, have applied that prophecy to Jesus and the Church.

When Paul writes the first letter to the Christians in Corinth—we read the opening of that letter as our second reading—he writes to a people who see themselves as the heirs of that promise. That’s why he can call them “the church of God” and a “holy people” capable of receiving “grace and peace.”

When we hear those words of John the Baptist in the beginning of the fourth Gospel, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” we are hearing the Easter understanding of the Christian community interpreting the death and resurrection of Jesus as a new Passover, the initiation of a new Exodus, a new freedom from bondage. The evangelist draws on Old Testament language to speak of this fresh act of God’s salvation in Jesus.

The Old Testament also helps explain what “baptizing in the Holy Spirit” means. The prophets, especially Joel and Ezekiel, spoke of a future blessing of God that would come in the form of a kind of drenching by the Spirit of God, one that would transform the community of Israel to a just and righteous life with God and with one another. For example, Ezekiel, speaking to the same refugees that Second Isaiah addressed, said:

I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.” (36:24–28)

That’s what it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, to be empowered by divine grace to live the full life of the covenant relationship with God and with one another.

Has it happened yet? Yes and no. In a few minutes I am going to hold up a consecrated wafer and repeat the words of John the Baptist: “This is the Lamb of God. This is he who takes away the sin of the world.” We know what this means: Redemption has occurred in the event we commemorate and make present in this sacramental meal, the death and resurrection of Jesus. But suppose a non-Christian visiting us today is paying close attention to what we say and do here. When I raise the host and say those words, might he not think, “‘Takes away the sin of the world?’ The sin of the world still seems very much with us. What about the racism that is still very much alive today? What about politicians who work to protect corporate welfare even as they work to deconstruct policies meant to support poor children and families? What about a culture whose legal system routinely allows the killing of its unborn? What about people so bent on ‘ethnic cleansing’ that other nations have to come in and police them? The work of your Lamb is apparently unfinished.”

What would we say to such an outside observer of our Eucharist? We’d have to say, “Yes, you are right. We understand that the Lamb takes

away the sin of the world in a sacrificial and forgiving love enabling us to be in covenant relationship to our God. We believe that we have already entered that blessing in our life of faith in the Church. But you are right to expect that this should have some effect in the larger world. The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world partly through *us*, to the extent that we work for justice, racial healing, the protection of the unborn, the support of children—in every part of our lives as workers, employers, family members, and citizens.”

What keeps us hopeful in the midst of so much darkness and violence is the knowledge that the Spirit of God empowers us to be the light of the world. God does the saving. Missioned by our baptism and confirmation, nourished by the Eucharist, let us cooperate.

|| This Sunday’s texts invited an exploration of the broad themes of covenant and the covenant renewal of the Eucharist. My hope was that this treatment of the themes would enable the congregation to associate our celebration of the sacrament with our public lives. ||

#### 4. Some Conclusions

Out of my own efforts to preach with some attention to biblical justice, I have come up with the following items of self-advice, which I offer here in the hope that they will be helpful to others.

1. **Let the lectionary readings of the day speak.** The word of God, and not one of my pet causes, provides the cues for my homily. My charge as preacher is to “break open” the word in a way that nurtures the faith of the assembled worshipping community. Any application to peace-and-justice issues must flow from that nurturing of the faith. We are preaching in a ritual moment called the Service of the Word preceding a Service of the Eucharist; this should ensure that anything we say about the Christian challenge of a contemporary issue is grounded in Eucharistic faith, never coming across like a freestanding editorial, detached from the framework of worship.

A precondition for this openness to the Word is regular—ideally, daily—Bible study. For us as preachers (even part-time or occasional preachers), this is a matter of professional practice, not personal predilection. The spiritual nourishment of our people depends on it.

An even more basic precondition for this openness to the sacred text is that we take it to prayer. If we don’t pray it, we can’t really say it—from the heart. What I have not allowed to touch my spirit will not move others.

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2. **Keep up on current events.** “The Bible in one hand, newspaper in the other” (Karl Barth’s maxim, I think) is still good advice for sermon preparation. Facts, stories, and quotations from print and electronic media do not only engage the imagination and emotion; used appropriately, they can provide examples of issues to which our gospel vision speaks.

3. **Get to know Catholic social teaching.** Our best-kept secret, some have called it. Recent popes—John XXIII, Paul VI, especially John Paul II—and our own U.S. bishops have written powerful documents addressing current social issues. The recently published *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (especially part 3) summarizes much of this quite well. Familiarity with these seminal documents builds confidence and leads to spontaneity in relating pertinent church teaching to the readings of the day and to current justice issues. And our Sunday homily may be the only place some people ever hear of Catholic social teaching.

4. **Learn well our Catholic traditions of the common good and the preferential option for the poor.** Our recent experience of the U.S. Congress has vividly taught us that the power of special-interest groups is having more effect than the impulse to work for the common good—to the neglect of the needs of the poorest among us. Reflection on our classic common-good vision will constantly stretch us beyond our vested interests. And it won’t happen in our nation as a whole if it doesn’t first happen within our churches.

5. **Teach the link between discipleship and citizenship.** The famous “wall of separation between Church and State” (a misrepresentation of the First Amendment) was meant to protect religion from government intervention, not to protect government from participation by religious people. Our faith obliges us to be people who exercise our citizenship for the common good. An important resource on this theme is the “USCC Statement on Political Responsibility.”<sup>14</sup>

6. **Avoid harping on a limited set of issues.** People need to know the full depth and range of biblical tradition and Catholic social teaching. Nothing turns a listener off faster than reflecting, “There goes Father X again, off on his pet cause of . . .” And be content at times to preach without any specific reference to peace-and-justice issues.

7. **Highlight our special moment in U.S. history.** The obvious task of church leadership in the immigrant period of the U.S. Catholic experience

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<sup>14</sup> *Origins* 25, no. 22, (Nov. 16, 1995): 370–83. Stephen L. Carter has written provocatively on faith and citizenship in *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Doubleday, 1994).

was to develop the support system that would help our people enter the civic mainstream while keeping the faith. We had to prove that Roman Catholics could be good U.S. citizens. In many ways the election of a Catholic president signaled the achievement of that goal. Since the seventies and eighties, our bishops have been saying, in effect, “We have proved that we belong; now let’s enrich the American dream with our traditions of justice and peace. We have much to contribute to the unfinished U.S. American democratic experiment.” The pastoral letters *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) and *Economic Justice for All* (1986) were prime examples of this leadership. Cardinal Bernardin’s advocacy of a consistent ethic of life, recently bolstered by John Paul II’s *Evangelium vitæ*, is another example. Helping our people become aware of this change in posture toward the surrounding culture may aid them see the point of exploring justice-and-peace themes at our Sunday worship.

8. **Draw information from sources that are alternatives to the mainstream media.** The way the standard print and electronic media covered Catholic Church presence during recent Latin American revolutions was an object lesson to many of us that often mainstream journalism is not a trustworthy source of information. Other sources—for example, *The National Catholic Reporter*, *The Tablet*, *The National Jesuit News*, *New Oxford Review*, National Public Radio, *America*, and *Commonweal*—often provide what is lacking in other public reports when we are looking for perspective on current issues.<sup>15</sup>

9. **Help people see that all political parties fall short of the gospel vision.** A church position on one particular issue may have a “Republican” or “conservative” ring, while church teaching on another issue may sound “Democratic” or “liberal.” If we faithfully relate the gospel vision to current issues over the long haul, people will soon see that our faith vision calls us beyond all party platforms. The Gospel is neither “right” nor “left.” It is

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<sup>15</sup> Other useful sources: advocacy groups like *Network: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby*, 801 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 460, Washington, DC 20003, (202) 547-5556 // Center of Concern, 3700 Thirteenth Street NE, Washington, DC 20017, (202) 635-2757 // Pax Christi USA: National Catholic Peace Movement, 348 East Tenth Street, Erie, PA 16503-1110, (814) 453-4955 // Bread for the World, 1100 Wayne Avenue, Suite 1000, Silver Spring, MD 20910, (301) 608-2400 // and the Religious Task Force on Central America, 1747 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20009-1108, (202) 387-7652 // Worldwatch Institute, 1776 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20077-6628 (among other things, they publish an annual report—the 1996 edition is thirteenth in the series—called *State of the World: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress toward a Sustainable Society*) // and *Sojourners* (a magazine and a grassroots network for personal, community, and political transformation: 2401 15th Street NW, Washington, DC 20009).

radical, that is to say, rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus. On the vision of justice that guides us, the recent Jesuit congregation makes this helpful observation: "It is deeply rooted in the Scriptures, Church tradition, and our Ignatian heritage. It transcends notions of justice derived from ideology, philosophy, or particular political movements, which can never be an adequate expression of the justice of the Kingdom for which we are called to struggle at the side of our Companion and King."<sup>16</sup> Sometimes an ostensibly Roman Catholic candidate or official does not truly represent church teaching. And some congregations may need to be informed that the so-called Catholic Alliance of the Christian Coalition has no valid claim to official connection with the Catholic Church.

10. **Don't fear revealing a personal position of conscience.** In a matter of public policy about which people of faith can differ intelligently, it will not hurt, and may help, to share with the community your stand on the issue, without implying that they must take the same stand. To do so reminds people that we are called to come to a reasoned position of conscience in debatable matters, and that we can help one another by sharing with one another how we come to our positions. Our use of military force in the Gulf War was a recent example. The death penalty is another.

11. **Don't overload the Sunday homily.** The homily is meant to fan the flame of faith, to help the worshiping community realize what we do at Eucharist. A sermon may do no more than plant a seed, deepen a symbol, point to a connection with public policy. The full harvest of action for justice depends on what goes on in classrooms, RCIA, adult education, social-needs committees, study groups, and involvement in such advocacy and service groups as Pax Christi, Birthright, Bread for the World, Amnesty International, and Network. But the seed must be planted.

12. **Think of preaching as a matter both of cultural accommodation and cultural critique.** The secular culture in which we U.S. Americans live prizes choice, mobility, and the maximizing of profit over the dignity of the human person in community. Our religious tradition also values choice, mobility, and profit, but always *insofar as these things serve the dignity of each human person in community*. Catholic social teaching is not a fringe item but mainstream magisterium. Moreover, it affirms values sorely needed for the recovery of community and the survival of democracy. Preaching biblical justice leaves none of this out. Rather, such preaching provides the full

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<sup>16</sup> GC 34, "Our Mission and Justice," in *The Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), §53 (p. 40).

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context for Catholic social teaching and roots it in the deeper tradition of our Scripture and in the action of our communal worship.

## Afterthoughts

I submit this essay for publication with some reluctance. What Jesuit is comfortable preaching to Jesuits? Even more, what Jesuit dares to preach to Jesuits about preaching? Beyond that, what Jesuit would expose publicly a batch of his homily notes as examples? I have dared to do this because I am convinced that our convoluted discussions about implementing our commitment to the promotion of justice and the service of faith have, by and large, neglected the role preaching can play in this understanding of our mission today.

This effort to share some of the fruits of my own limited experience has helped me realize a number of things. Vatican II's revival of the biblical homily, and the consequent renewal of the lectionary, has helped us recover the awareness that an integral part of the ordained priesthood is the preaching of the word, the whole word. The study of biblical language and imagery has helped us understand that the theme of covenant justice in the Bible, linked with the postbiblical tradition of Catholic social teaching, provides for us the best possible lens for understanding and addressing current justice-and-peace issues. Moreover, it is becoming clear that our preaching is not simply a matter of adapting our ministry to our culture but also of ministering to a culture itself in need of healing. A lifetime of ongoing preaching may be one of the most powerful expressions of this healing ministry. If "culture" means "the way in which a group of people live, think, feel, organize themselves, celebrate and share life," then biblical preaching is surely one way of ministering to our culture.<sup>17</sup> Such preaching deals with the very images and feelings with which persons and communities experience and express their faith. The preaching of biblical justice, then, ministers to the very cultural infrastructure of a community's faith life. Preaching biblical justice can also vivify the secular culture in which we participate, even as it nurtures, in some respects, a kind of counterculture challenging that larger culture where the Gospel prompts such challenging. To paraphrase what Chesterton said about jury duty, preaching biblical justice is too important to leave to the experts.

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<sup>17</sup> This is the definition of "culture" offered in the first footnote of Decree 4, "Our Mission and Culture," in *The Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, §75 n. 1 (p. 49).

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