

THAW!

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Of/for Canadian Anglican and Ecumenical Franciscans

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EDITORIAL NOTES

Welcome back to the fall season, as the secular calendar would have it. The summer was especially difficult for me. I took on the task of reading two books which proved to be difficult in the extreme. Harry Potter was difficult because to catch the essence of book seven, you needed to be in the swim of things and be familiar with the other six. So I interviewed my grandchildren and their mother who have done the whole Potter journey. The Pope's book on Jesus of Nazareth was difficult because it is a scholarly and dull read. I explain below.

Locally, we rejoice because Lyndon Hutchinson Houndsel has moved into the region to be rector of one of our great Winnipeg Churches. His celebration of ministry will be September 18.

Please consider writing material for "Thaw". It eases the burden. Harold TSSF

SIMPLICITY

These are good time to be a third order Franciscan. The notes of Franciscan life harmonize with the needs of our times. Especially, simplicity.

In transportation, simplicity means a small car or bus tickets. Or a bicycle. Or best of all, walking. Less money, smaller environmental imprint, better health.

In nutrition simplicity means "less". Nutrition is surely a complex matter today. Food testing complicates more than it guides. For instance cholesterol is bad for you. Oops! Not all cholesterol; there's good C and there's bad C. Trans-fats are bad. Salt is bad, but salt is in everything. Proteins are good; like steak and soy. but who can live on steak all day long. So the best rule is to eat less of everything. My doctor recommends the HAM diet: "Half As Much". Not as easy as it sounds but, guess what - it works. Your "half" would be a feast for Father Francis.

In housing, ask yourself why you need more than one bathroom. I know a woman who, widowed, bought a four bedroom condo. She is hoping her grown kids will come to visit her. Once a year? Meanwhile, empty spaces are being paid for.

Many people I know have two computers each. One on the desk at home and the other in a case on the seat of the car.

Or there are Blackberries. You can be in constant touch with your network. Who needs it? Especially if one has a phone, an email address, a fax.

And there are books and libraries. A university library card costs \$60 annually. For that I obtain many theological books easily available. Not many of the theological students read these up-to-date texts which their professors order, in hope.

And if you're buying a book, there are booksellers who mail it out to you free. Think of the saving in gas and time and trouble.

Simplicity is a very timely note to play.

HELL IS REAL ESTATE

C.S. Lewis once described hell as a dilemma of real estate. It goes like this.

Hell is the condition in which every person can have what he or she wants. When people arrive in hell the first thing they want is a better house. They opt for typical

luxury. Two car garage, three bathrooms, family room, etc. However looking through the window they spy a house bigger and better. So they make another wish: this time it's a three car garage, five bathrooms. Soon this is not sufficient. They move away where they can't see any other houses and build themselves a monster home: ten bathroom, twelve bedrooms, a five car garage. And far away from any others which are out of sight. That's hell said CS. Lewis. All you want and completely alone.

In some respects, that sounds just like neighbourhoods in the new Vancouver. Or any other Canadian city, one might say. People buy adequate housing only to knock it down and replace with a house of far larger footprint. Prices have gone through the roof. Normal people can't afford to live there any more.

In Newfoundland, the people of the outports are moving away because there is no fishery while St. John's is decorated with building cranes in response to the oil of Hibernia. A technical class is moving in. There is a disconnect.

As cities are turning into little "hells" can ordinary people live under the radar? Not likely. Suppose you have a small home; lived there for decades. Now it's caught up in the ballooning prices of larger homes. Your little domicile is worth a small fortune. But you dare not sell and move. You can't afford to buy anything else. So you cling as you rise. But your balloon catches fire. The taxes rise, the home services go through the roof and you, on a modest and fixed income, are squeezed out. Or you're a tenant. Your end is simple. The rent goes up. Or you are given the option to buy your place as a condo which you can't afford. Out you go, on the street.

Unless you're lucky and your rising expenses can be met by increasing the mortgage on your place, if you own it. Notwithstanding: Hell is Real Estate and Real Estate is Hell.

Benedict 16 and J.K. Rowling

Sometimes events which are apparently unrelated find themselves in the same place at the same time, strictly by accident. And that's what happened to the Pope's first volume on "Jesus of Nazareth" and J.K. Rowling's seventh and final volume, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows". They emerged at about the same time. The coincident invites comparison.

Well right off, we notice that "Jesus of Nazareth", Benedict's personal search for the face of God, places Jesus the Christ at the centre of every chapter, as the omega point of every gospel movement. (More later).

The culmination of Jesus' ministry as we all know, is death on the cross, the hallowed death in which we are all saved. So Benedict, in focusing on christology, is not very far from what we might call, "Jesus and the Deathly Hallows". For his part, Harry Potter, in this final chapter of his life, is plagued with death, including his own, from which he emerges, (am I telling secrets?), and is anything but the cheery victor of a cosmic battle, which he and his fellows, won.

The journey of both Jesus and Harry through their respective deathly hallows' is redemptive; it changes the world for years to come and for the good. That's only for starters.

Both Benedict and JK are wizards. The latter is a paramount mistress of the magic arts; especially the art of invention since her plots are ingenious, twisting and turning with every page and the world of magic created in the Harry Potter series is entertaining, fresh and in her universe, believable.

That's not all: the author herself is a bit of a wizard. She pulls off many a tour de force, the greatest being in this seventh book where black become white and white, black according to her shifty imagination.

But JK is not the only wizard here. Benedict does some magic of his own. His wand turns the entire New Testament into christology, as he announced early in his first volume. That is to say, whether he is considering the Old Testament concept of the Kingdom of God, or the Sermon on the Mount, or the Lord's Prayer, or the Parables, they all morph into the Person of Christ, who is the perfect expression of whatever is under consideration. Jesus is the Kingdom, the Lord's Prayer is about Him, the beatitudes are about him. The whole thing turns into the living God-man, Jesus the divine second person of the Trinity. I like this but only up to a point.

From there it's a short step to consider the Church, which is preoccupied with the life of Jesus, as the custodian of the Kingdom, Prayer, moral behaviour, etc. Leonardo Boff, kicked out of the Roman Church for his adherence to liberation theology, would not have made such a direct link between the theology of the Kingdom on the one hand and the devotion of the church on the other.

There is a fundamental point in both books which bears special attention. Rowling identifies evil as the obsession with a humanly defined purity, in the interests of which, many are destroyed, persecuted and excluded from the promises of life. The impure are the "mudbloods".

Redemption, in the minds of the forces of evil, is to rid the world of this mixture and

to improve life by achieving purity of race and blood.

JK is taking us back to the passions of Nazi Germany, to the extermination of the Jews, to the noxious notions of a master race. In our time, it is Muslims who are likely to be the mudbloods; or any group which does not share ones own make-up and value system. We think of racial profiling.

Rowling is protecting a fundamental element of Christian theology, in which all are made in the image of God. There was a time, 150 years ago when it was argued there were two acts of creation in Genesis; one for white folk and another (from the dust of the earth) for blacks. Christian theology, as announced in Paul, asserted however that there was one baptism, one Lord and one God and Father of all.

To our dismay, we find that Benedict himself has reverted to a type of religious profiling, to a concept of religious purity, of "true Church" at the same time that he has published his book. In his view, only Roman Catholics have the whole faith. This sits badly with his personal quest for the face of God.

In this respect, Benedict is about an exclusionary Church, and JK is about an inclusive culture. The difference is stark.

There are other comparisons. Readability; Harry Potter is a page turner. The Pope's book is difficult. It's type is small. It is semi academic; readership would have to be first year post graduate divinity. It is a theological restatement of Roman Catholic orthodoxy, a la WWII, a la Mersche, a la Guardini. It reads as if Vatican II never happened. To the ordinary pew sitter, it's going to be a groan. It's hard to understand what specific audience Benedict is addressing. He needs to wave his wand a couple more times.

One wishes that Benedict 16 had gone to school with Harry and learned a better kind of wizardry.