

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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January 2014

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is "The Conversion of Saint Paul" by Christoph Daniel Schenck (c.1633-1691). It is a basswood carving, about 14½x10½", executed in 1685. It is displayed in the Getty Center in Los Angeles. We chose it in honor of the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul on January 25.

It is traditional that when Saul of Tarsus (later called Saint Paul) had his vision on the road to Damascus, he was blinded and fell off his horse. The Bible says nothing about a horse (Acts 9:3ff), although almost all artistic representations of the event depict him as having fallen from his horse.¹ In this carving, we see Paul lying on the ground, his eyes closed, emblematic of his having been blinded. In the clouds above him is Christ holding his cross, surrounded by the heads of *putti*.² From his mouth comes a banner bearing the words *Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris?* ("Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"). While most of the carving is bas relief, the body of Paul is foreshortened and deeply cut, and the head and foreleg of the horse are undercut, thus emphasizing the drama of the situation.

There is a sister carving, the Penitent St. Peter. The two carvings were

intended to be meditational images, perhaps for some patron's *Kunstkammer* (art gallery). On the other hand, since Schenck often worked for monastic patrons, the pair of carvings may have been intended for use in a monastery.

Christoph Daniel Schenck was born into a family of famous sculptors in Konstanz, northern Switzerland, sometime around 1633. He learned sculpture from his father, Johann Christoph Schenck. He specialized in religious carvings, usually in wood or ivory. He also gained fame throughout Europe for his wooden altarpieces and altar carvings. He did most of his work during the Counter-Revolution, the period when the Church was fighting against the Reformation. During his lifetime Protestantism had not gained a foothold in northern Switzerland and southern Germany. At this time churches and monasteries all over Europe were remodeling and redecorating their places of worship, and woodcarving was a very popular art form in central and northern Europe. Schenck's works frequently represents situations involving suffering or penitence. They showed an amazing interweaving of stark naturalism and deep emotionalism.

Schenck died in Konstanz in 1691.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ In fact, Jews generally preferred donkeys, because to them horses were symbols of Roman power and oppression.

² *Putti* were an Italian artistic construct very popular in the Renaissance; they were also often used in northern European art of the time. They represent angels, but in their earlier use in ancient Roman sculpture they represented the cruel and capricious boy-god Cupid.

True Generosity

An article in the October 23 issue of *Time* said, "Adelson ... gave a whopping \$92.8 million, along with his wife Miriam, to outside political groups in the 2012 election cycle."

A Word from the Editor

It's a new year, at least for the world—the Church's new year began in December, with the First Sunday of Advent. Along with the new year comes the old ritual of making New Year's resolutions that down inside we know we will probably not keep. Keeping promises is not a high priority in today's society, and unfortunately this seems to bother few people.

As Christians, however, it should bother us. If we make a promise to God, we are expected to keep it. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it. . . Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay." (Eccl. 5:4-5). Part of the implicit promise that we make to God when we accept the Christian Faith is that we will honor him and place him above all else. God is not a convenient tool that we keep handy so that he will be available when we need him.

In *Murder In the Cathedral*, T. S. Eliot has St. Thomas Becket wrestling with the prospect of martyrdom. He knows that his martyrdom will be a great boon to the Church, yet he also knows that to die as a martyr for Christ is to assure salvation. While his death should be for the sake of the Church, he wants it for his own sake, and he knows that this is wrong. Satan tempts him to avoid martyrdom altogether, because "the greatest treason is to do the right thing for the wrong reason." Finally Becket comes to realize that to do the right thing even for the wrong reason is better than not to do it at all. He sees that as long as we

know what the right reason is and are aware that we may fall short of it, we are justified in doing the right thing even if it is for the wrong reason.

This is the basis of self-discipline, and it is through self-discipline that we maintain a strong character and a healthy spiritual life. An essential part of that self-discipline is regular prayer and the regular worship of God *in church*, as a part of of the congregation of the faithful. Prayer and corporate worship are part of the vow that we have vowed to God, and we are duty bound to maintain these disciplines whether or not at any given time we "get anything out of it." We should not do it for the purpose of getting something out of it, but for the purpose of giving of ourselves to God and to the encouragement of others. There is absolutely nothing—not even an Alabama-Auburn game, a great golfing opportunity, or even a roaring hangover—that is more important than the regular worship of God. It is not something to be done when we feel like it or when there is nothing more interesting happening. Rather, it is something around which everything else should be scheduled.

Whatever our reason for disciplining ourselves to worship in church every Sunday, be it the right one or the wrong one, it is still the right thing. The wonderful thing is that the more we do it, for whatever reason, the more we come to know the joy of the presence of God in our lives.

Father Rick Losch

Evening Prayer and Parish Supper

January's Evening Prayer and supper will be on Wednesday, January 15th at 6:00 p.m. It will celebrate the winter season with a "Comfort Food Supper." Think of your favorite "comfort food" for the cold winter days and nights and plan to bring it. Signup sheets for different types of dishes and for those who plan to attend will be posted in the parish house kitchen so that we may know how many for whom to plan. For more details, please speak with Hiram Patrenos or Candace Strickland. As always, there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. Please plan to attend.

Hiram Patrenos

Annual Parish Meeting

At the Annual Parish Meeting held on Sunday, December 8th, Roy Underwood and Ethel Scott were elected to the Vestry for terms expiring on December 31, 2016, replacing Madelyn Mack and Hiram Patrenos whose terms expired December 31st, 2013. Other members of the Vestry are Joe Moore and Rosalie Dew, whose terms expire on December 31, 2014, and Barry Green-Burns and Mary Helen Jones, whose terms expire on December 31, 2015. The Vestry met following the Annual Meeting and elected the following officers for 2014: Roy Underwood, Senior Warden; Ethel Scott, Junior Warden; Raiford Noland, Treasurer; and Fr. Losch, Clerk. Thank you to Ms. Mack and Mr. Patrenos for their dedicated service to the Vestry and St. James'.

Hiram Patrenos

Every Member Canvass

Thank you to all who have returned your pledge cards. If you have not yet completed your pledge card, it is not too late. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the church. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James'. Cards may be placed in the Alms Basins or mailed to the Treasurer, T. Raiford Noland, St. James' Church, P. O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470.

Hiram Patrenos

Wilmer Hall Christmas Contribution

Thank you to everyone who contributed towards our special gift to Wilmer Hall for its Christmas needs this year. Through your generosity St. James' contributed \$750 for the Christmas needs of the children. A letter of thanks from Wilmer Hall has been posted on the bulletin board in the parish house.

Hiram Patrenos

Thank you!

Many thanks to all of you for your kind wishes and generous gifts for Christmas and my 80th birthday. I am truly grateful all your thoughtfulness.

Richard R. Losch+

A man looked down at the vegetarian meal in front of him and grumbled, "That's not food. That's what food eats!"

Be Wordly Wise ***Indifferent***

Today this word means unconcerned or mediocre: "I am indifferent to politics" or "The restaurant has an indifferent cuisine." Someone recently asked, "We have disgruntled employees. Do we also have any grunted ones?" Similarly, we might ask, "I am indifferent to politics. Are you different to them?" Surprisingly, the answer could be "yes." Originally (400 years ago or so), to be indifferent did not mean to be unconcerned, it meant to be concerned but neutral. To be different to something meant to take a particular position that was different from that of someone else. The 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* prays for those in authority, "... that they may truly and indifferently administer justice." Hamlet says (iii.1), "I am myself indifferent honest." The word came into English from the Middle French *diférent*, "partial," which in turn came from the Latin *deferre*, "to carry away." This is also the source of both meanings of *defer*: to delay (a meeting) and submit (to an opinion).

Richard R. Losch+

Plan Ahead

The October 22 Minneapolis *Star-Tribune*, reporting on park restoration, said, "The turf has taken a beating from heavy grazing by geese and picnickers." We would think the picnickers would rather bring their own food.

We can ignore reality, but we cannot ignore the consequences of ignoring reality.

Atheist Christmas

American Atheists, Inc. has acknowledged that there is no way that Americans will give up the Christmas festivities, so they have suggested a replacement. They propose changing it to a celebration of the Winter Solstice, when the days begin to lengthen again. They suggest calling it the Feast of the Unconquered Sun.

One of the most intensely religious cults in ancient Rome was that of the god Sol Invictus, "Unconquered Sun," whose festival was celebrated at the Winter Solstice. The emperor Constantine I was a devotee of Sol Invictus before he converted to Christianity. God is not without a sense of humor. It seems that the atheists want to replace an ancient Christian celebration with an equally religious ancient pagan one.

Richard R. Losch+

DHR Food Pantry

The Livingston churches are rotating in collecting canned goods for the DHR food pantry, whose stocks are running very short. January is St. James' month. Please bring canned goods (no boxes or perishables) and leave them in the box in the narthex.

Richard R. Losch+

[Secularists] think that stressing God's mercy means that sins are no longer sins. On the contrary, God's mercy is a great gift of grace precisely because sins are sins and they call for repentance and forgiveness.

+Thomas John Paprocki

“Canned” Prayers

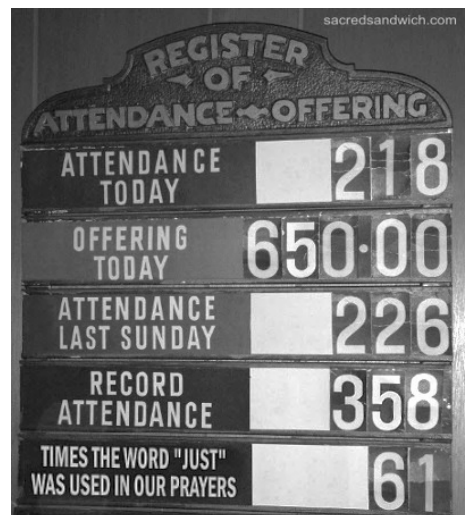
A frequent objection to traditional liturgy is the lack of extemporaneous prayer in favor of prescribed (and often ancient) prayers. Some people call these “canned” prayers, and many of them remain the same for service after service. While this is true, those of us in the Catholic tradition prefer it that way. In our liturgical tradition there is no place for extemporaneous prayer. For one thing, public worship is just that—public—and as such it is a corporate act, and is not the place for the expression of one’s personal and private relationship with God. While that relationship is essential to a healthy spiritual life, it is private. Corporate worship, on the other hand, is the communal worship of the Church, the Body of Christ, and should represent the spiritual life of that whole body, and not the individuals who make it up. There is a large body of traditional prayers called Collects which, as the name implies, offer the collective thanksgivings and petitions of the entire Church. On any given Sunday or holy day, every Mass or liturgical office throughout the world offers the same collect. This has a powerful unifying effect, representing the unity of the Church, the Body of Christ. These collects were written, for the most part, by the great spiritual leaders of the past, and have been long tried in the crucible of tradition.

Another aspect of the lack of extemporaneous prayer that I find appealing is that a prayer offered for public corporate worship should be carefully and prayerfully prepared. In

our private prayers we should simply pour out our hearts without concern for grammar or structure. God does not judge us on our language, but on what is in our hearts. Public corporate worship, on the other hand, if it is to be effective in uniting the people into a common worshiping body, must be dignified and carefully thought out. Sloppy liturgy leads to sloppy spirituality. Most people, including trained clergy, do not have the gift of being able to organize and express a dignified public prayer “off the cuff.” I have heard many a prayer in which the word “just” is used twice as often as the Name of God. I often wonder how many others besides me are tempted to count the “justs” rather than focusing on what is actually being said in the prayer.

Private prayer, then, by its very nature, may be informal and unstructured. Public prayer, on the other hand, needs to be formal, dignified, and well thought out in advance.

Richard R. Losch+



Atheist or Antitheist?

I know many people who call themselves atheists, but only a very few of them really are. A true atheist believes that there is no God, and that everything in existence came about by random natural forces. More importantly, though, a true atheist is not the least bit afraid of God—after all, one cannot fear something that he believes does not exist. If I were to set up a cross or religious shrine in my yard, a true atheist would have no objection to it other than that he might question my good taste. Also, an atheist has no fear of death—to him, dying is nothing more than going to sleep permanently. While he might regret no longer enjoying the benefits of life and he might fear a lingering painful death, he has no fear of death itself. Show me a man who fears death and I will show you a man who believes in an afterlife and fears that in it he will be held accountable. It is said that there are no atheists in foxholes.

Atheists are often confused with agnostics. This is another group that is relatively rare. The word “agnostic” comes from the Greek for “not knowable.” A true agnostic believes that there is a God, but that man cannot know him and therefore can have no relationship with him. Most people who call themselves agnostics are simply unwilling to make the effort to learn enough about God to be able to accept or reject him. They are uncommitted, not unbelieving. There is a huge difference between a God who cannot be known and a man who cannot decide whether God exists. A sim-

ilar philosophy is Deism. Deists believe that God created the universe and then abandoned it to run by itself. He may observe what is going on in his creation, but does not intervene in its affairs. Deism was popular in the late 17th to the early 19th centuries in the wake of the Enlightenment. Few people today identify themselves as Deists, although many so-called atheists actually think that way.

At the vanguard of the atheist movement today is an outspoken activist group that is made up mainly of antitheists. Most of the “separation of Church and State” activists also fall into this group. They have become so obsessed with removing any religious expression from all aspects of government that they have forgotten that the First Amendment was written to protect the Church from the State, not vice versa.¹ An antitheist is someone who believes that there is a God, and opposes him. For the most part these people would rarely identify themselves as antitheists, and probably do not even realize that this is what they are. It is likely that the only people who recognize and admit that they are antitheists are Satan worshipers, most of whom have serious psychological problems.

The antitheistic activist “atheists” want to remove every reminder of religion from the public square. Many of them would also probably like to

¹ The Church represents God, and the State represents mankind. If they are to be absolutely separated and have no interaction, then by definition they must be equal. I, for one, do not place God on an equal footing with man.

see all religious expression removed, including any public or private religious practice that can be seen by others. Fortunately, they know that constitutional protections will prevent this, at least for the time being, so as yet they have not tried to go that far.

As have said, the true atheist is not upset by nor opposed to religious expression—he simply does not want it to interfere with his own life. The antitheist, on the other hand, wants every reminder of religion wiped away. If he is never reminded of it, he is not forced to confront his own doubts and fears. If a little child doesn't have to think about the monster under the bed, then his fears are eased. Every time he is reminded of it, the monster becomes more real to him.

I have compassion for these people. I am claustrophobic, and the very thought of being immobilized in a tight place puts me on the verge of panic. It's discomfoting even to write about it. I can imagine the panic of having to think about standing before God's judgment unprepared. Atheists and antitheists need our prayers, not our curses or disdain. The Church formally prays every Holy Week for those who have no faith or who have lost their faith, but once a year is not enough. Pray for them daily.

Richard R. Losch+

Ancient Judean House

The Israel Antiquities Authority recently announced the discovery of a 10,000-year-old stone house in the Judean Shephelah, the lowland just west of Jerusalem. It is located in Eshtaol, the town that about 7,000 years later would be associated with the birth and burial of Samson (Jdg. 13:25, 16:31). The house was built in the beginning of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic Period (Late Stone Age), and denotes a major step forward in human civilization. At the time it was built, humans were still hunter-gatherers. The building of a house indicates a great innovation: the beginning of agriculture and the domestication of farm animals, when man no longer wandered about looking for wild vegetation and animals to eat.

In the excavation archaeologists found evidence of the development over the millennia from a simple dwelling to a carefully planned urban center. One important find was a 6,000-year-old structure that contained a "standing stone," a sacred pillar, indicating that it was a cultic shrine of some sort.¹ This would have long preceded the Israelite incursion, and would have been a shrine to a pagan Canaanite god.

Richard R. Losch+

It is not the Church that must change to conform its teachings to the views of the world, but it is each individual who is called to be configured to Christ.

*+Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield, IL (R.C.)*

¹ The term "standing stone" (Hebrew *massebah*, מצבה) occurs 34 times in the Old Testament. Moses erected 12 *masseboth* on Mount Sinai to commemorate the Covenant, and Jacob erected one at Beth-el after his vision of the ladder to heaven. They were also often used by pagans to honor their gods, and thus were condemned in the Jewish Law.

Bronze Age Collapse

One of the major factors in the advance of the Israelites into Canaan was what archaeologists call the Bronze Age Collapse. It is one of the mysteries of ancient civilization, but recent discoveries have shed new light on its possible explanation.

The Late Bronze Age lasted from about 1500-1200 B.C. in the Aegean and Near East, and during it there existed several mighty and highly civilized empires. Among these were the Mycenaeans, who were the predecessors to the classic Greeks; the Hittites, who from their capital at Hattusa ruled all of Anatolia (now Turkey) and northern Syria; and the Egyptians, who ruled not only the Nile valley, but also all of Palestine and southern Syria. Commerce flourished, and all these great empires traded with one another throughout the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia. For example, a late 14th century B.C. shipwreck has been found that contains cargo from Egypt, Anatolia, Cyprus, Mycenae and Canaan. The infrastructure of these empires was advanced and extensive, and after the collapse its like would not be seen again until the time of Imperial Rome. Despite the huge success and technological achievements of these great empires, however, by the 12th century it all began to fall apart. Cities burned and were abandoned, and not always because of war. Trade routes crumbled, insurrections arose all over the region, and the trade routes crumbled and most of them were left desolate and unused. By the end of the 12th centu-

ry there were vast migrations of peoples, often moving into other peoples' territories with the intent of conquest. Those who were successful sometimes settled down, and sometimes moved on after slaughtering or driving out their victims.

There are countless theories of what caused the collapse, including plague, earthquakes, or marauding armies such as the Sea People. On the other hand, many think that the marauders were the result of the collapse, not its cause. Others blame the outbreak of wars, citing Homer's *Iliad* as an account of the type of warfare that typified the time.

The Bronze Age Collapse was as sudden and rapid as it was destructive. It was followed by a "Dark Age" of ignorance and illiteracy, during which much of the earlier technology was forgotten, few records were kept, and population plummeted throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Because of the lack of records little is known about this time. Commercial records, literary writings and exhaustive inscriptions give us a detailed picture of life and culture during the Late Bronze Age, but much of the Dark Age, as its name implies, is unknown. Archaeology, however, is shedding more and more light on these times.

The two groups of migrants with whom Bible readers are most familiar were the Sea People and the Israelites. The Sea People, whom the Bible calls Philistines, were a pre-Hellenic people who came from Crete and other regions of the Aegean and invaded Palestine from the sea and tried to

conquer it.¹ The Israelites, as the Bible tells us, were a Semitic people who escaped slavery in Egypt and also tried to conquer Palestine, primarily the region known as Canaan. The Canaanites, like the great empires of the time, were stable and civilized.

The Bible tells us that it was a famine that originally caused the Israelites to move to Egypt, but many “demythologizers” debunked this because of the lack of evidence. There is a rapidly growing body of evidence, however, that there was indeed a famine that spread through the entire region of the great empires we have mentioned, and it might well have led to the Bronze Age Collapse.

The Institute of Archaeology at the University of Tel Aviv has completed an exhaustive study of pollen grains in sediment cores taken from under the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. It indicates that a primary factor in the Bronze Age Collapse may have been drought. Pollen grains are like fingerprints—every plant has a unique pattern—so researchers can identify with great accuracy what plants prevailed in a given region at a given time. The pollen in this study clearly indicates a rapid drop in the population of trees and plants that require a lot of water, and a sharp rise in the population of dry-climate plants such as olive trees. This is strong evidence of a harsh, widespread and extended drought that lasted from 1250 to 1100 B.C.

No major upheaval such as the collapse can be attributed to a single

cause, but a calamity such as a severe widespread drought would certainly be an important contributor to it. It would deal a heavy blow to any economy and usually lead to famine, and this in turn would cause major population migrations.² Empires differed greatly in language and culture in those days, so there was often distrust between them. Large population migrations between them therefore often resulted in military conflicts and often in outright warfare. With the breakdown of international communication, the trade collapsed and the empires fell into ruins. Egypt, Hatti and Mycenae all survived the collapse to one degree or another, but they would never again see the glory they know in the Late Bronze Age. Out of the Dark Age that ensued, however, would rise new kingdoms and empires such as Israel, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia and Greece.

Richard R. Losch+

Rahab the Harlot

One of the heroines of Joshua’s conquest of Jericho was Rahab, whom the Bible identifies as a harlot (Josh. 2:1). When the Israelite spies entered Jericho, Rahab hid them and helped them escape from the city. In return, when the city fell to the Israelites she was the only one who was allowed to live. Scholars over the centuries have asked countless questions about this story. Was she really a prostitute, or was she an innkeeper? Did she live on

¹ “Palestine” is a corruption of “Philistine.”

² The American “Dust Bowl” of the 1930s is a classic example of this.

the wall, or in a room in it? What was her motivation for betraying Jericho?

Many of these questions can never be answered, but recent scholarship has enabled us to answer some of them, or at least to gather some important clues.

The word that the Bible uses for her is *zonah* (זונה), which has traditionally has been translated “prostitute” or “harlot.” Many ancient documents have been found, however, that use this word to mean “woman who provides food and provisions”—in other words, “female innkeeper.” The Jews were one of the few ancient people who condemned prostitution. Most considered it a necessity for the “relief” of men, and although they considered prostitutes to be very low-class, they did not condemn the profession. The Jews did, however, and generally the Bible speaks very negatively about them. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the Book of Joshua says nothing negative about Rahab, but rather treats her as a heroine. This leads us to conclude that she was an innkeeper, not a prostitute.¹ Also, the fact that she lived with her family (Josh. 2:13) indicates that she was not a prostitute, for even though it was a legal profession, a prostitute would under no circumstances be living with

her parents and siblings.

As for the wall, what we have learned about the chronology of city walls can give us a clue. In the Late Bronze Age (16th to 13th centuries B.C.), when Jericho flourished, the stable culture provided the time and technology to build extremely thick and sturdy walls. Houses were often built on top of them not only to house guards, but to provide safe homes. In the Second Iron Age (6th century B.C.), when the Book of Joshua was written from oral tradition, the typical city wall was a casemate. This was a double wall with partitions between, forming a chain of rooms that were used sometimes for storage, and sometimes for residences. By the 6th century only the most ancient surviving cities had walls thick enough for houses to be built on them, while in the days of Rahab’s Jericho the casemate was extremely rare if used at all. The story was told as an oral tradition for six centuries before it was written, however. By the time it was written down it would have been told in terms that the listeners would understand: casemates, not thick walls. Finally, she hid the spies in the thatching in the roof (Josh. 2:6). A house on the wall would have had a roof made of rushes laid on small cross-poles. A casemate’s roof, on the other hand, would have been made of heavy timbers with stones laid on them. Thus Rahab is said to have lived *in* the wall, while it is most likely that she lived *on* it.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Similarly, there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. That is a fourth century invention based on the proximity of her story to that of the prostitute whom Jesus forgave. All that the Bible says is that she was healed of seven demons, which probably means something like depression or bipolar syndrome.

Don't Forget
 INTERFAITH
 MEN'S
 BREAKFAST
 JANUARY 5
 7:45 A.M.
 Mark your Calendar
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 EPISCOPAL CHURCH

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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