

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
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June 2019

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month, in honor of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (June 29), is Sir Peter Paul Rubens' *Saint Peter*, completed in about 1617. It is oil on a wood panel, measuring about 3'x2'2½". It is on display in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Images of the Apostles were very popular during the Counter-Reformation, especially after the Council of Trent (1565), which emphasized the importance of the intercession of the saints, particularly the Apostles, and the necessity of the Papacy as begun by Peter. Rubens produced a series of twelve paintings of the Apostles for the Duke of Lerma in his Antwerp studio in the early 1610s. This painting of Saint Peter is almost identical to the Lerma Saint Philip, except for the color of the robe, and the exchange of Philip's large cross for Peter's Keys of the Kingdom (Matt. 16:19). It is not certain that this painting was actually done by Rubens himself, but rather by one of his students in his studio under his direction.

The painting depicts Saint Peter as an older man. We can deduce from the Bible that he was about the same age as Jesus. He was crucified in Rome in AD 66, which would have put him in his mid to late sixties when he died. In Rubens' day that was considered fairly old. He is wearing a simple earth-tone robe, and holds in his hand the Keys of the Kingdom.

Rubens was the most influential painter of the Flemish Baroque tradition. He was also a classically educated scholar and an international diplomat who rubbed elbows with the crowned heads of Europe. For a biography of him we refer you to the July/August, 2018 *Epistle*. You can go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top, then click on that issue.

Richard R. Losch+

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A Word from the Editor

We are now winding down the Easter season as we approach Pentecost. Easter is a season of both death and life. Without the death of Christ his Resurrection means nothing, but the reverse is also true. And only with the gift of the Holy Spirit can we make sense of either, let alone understand their relationship. Contrary to much bad preaching, Christ's Resurrection did not abolish death—we can see that death is all around us. What the Resurrection did was to destroy the power of death. A "Peanuts" cartoon has Charlie Brown saying, "We only live once." Linus replies, "No, we only die once. We live every day." In one sense this is wise and true, but in another sense Linus is wrong. If we live our lives well, we regularly die to that in us which is bad or non-productive, and we rise in victory over it with new and better values and incentives.

Saul of Tarsus, who zealously persecuted Christians and inflicted as much suffering on the Church as he could, had a vision and revelation that caused the old Saul to die spiritually. He descended into a three-days' hell of blindness, torn by the conflict between his old firmly held beliefs of hatred and persecution, and the new set of beliefs of love and redemption to which Christ had called him. Saul the tormenter fell to the ground spiritually dead, and was resurrected as Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles. Although the tormenter spent the rest of his life tormented, he is ranked among the greatest of the saints, who laid the very foundation of Christian theology.

Saul had plans. He was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them back for trial, and he thought he was doing God's work. God had other plans for him, however, and Saul's plan never got carried out. So it is often with us. We go about our daily lives making plans and trying to fulfil them, often convincing ourselves that we are doing God's work. When God calls us to go in an entirely different direction—to die to our old ways and be resurrected to something new—we have the same choices that Saul had. We can refuse to listen and dismiss the call as no more than a stumbling-block to our plans, or we can listen to the call and answer it. It could be a

still, small voice as it was to Elijah, or it could be a blinding flash of light and a vision as it was to Saul. In either case, we have the choice as to how to respond to it. We can die to the old and be resurrected to the new, or we can just ignore it and go on with our old plans. The choice is ours. Pray for the wisdom to hear the call, and the strength and courage to answer it.

Father Rick Losch

DHR Food Bank

St. James' is responsible for supplying the Department of Human Resources Food Bank during the month of June. A basket is in the vestibule to receive your contributions. Please plan to bring something each week.

Hiram Patrenos

Parish Directory Update

We will be updating the Parish Directory during June and it will be published by July 1, 2019. Copies of the Parish Directory are available on the table in the Parish House. Please review it for any errors and/or omissions and give any additions or corrections in writing to Hiram Patrenos or e-mail them to him at patrenoj@bellsouth.net.

Hiram Patrenos

Bishop Sloan to Visit

The Right Reverend John McKee Sloan, Bishop of Alabama, will visit St. James' on Sunday, June 16th and will be the celebrant at Holy Communion which will begin at 11:00 a.m. A catered parish luncheon will follow the service. So that we may plan accurately, if you plan to attend the luncheon, you are asked to sign up on the sheet on the bulletin board in the vestibule or contact Hiram Patrenos at 205-499-0506 or patrenoj@bellsouth.net no later than Sunday, June 9th.

Hiram Patrenos

Thank You, Deep South Landscaping

We are grateful to Jason Gordy and his workers of Deep South Landscaping for their gift of giving and planting the summer flowers in the prayer garden as well as pruning and cleaning up the shrubbery. Earlier this spring they pruned all the shrubbery at the rectory and cleaned up the back fence there as well. We appreciate their hard work and generosity.

Hiram Patrenos

Thank You, Roy Underwood

Thank you to Roy Underwood for refinishing and assembling the small prie-dieu which was purchased and placed in the chancel to help our priests in their service at our altar.

Hiram Patrenos

Nero's "Golden House"

Last month in writing about the Roman Colosseum we mentioned Nero's Golden House, which the emperor Vespasian dismantled in order to pay off the enormous debts run up by Nero. When Nero died in AD 68 he left Rome bankrupt and deeply in debt. The sale of the incredible wealth of gold and art works from his palace enabled his successor Vespasian to pay off Rome's debts and set her on the road to prosperity again. By the time Vespasian was done with the palace there was very little left, but a few bits have survived. An underground room was recently discovered that contained wall paintings of panthers, centaurs and the Great Sphinx of Egypt.

In AD 64 a massive fire swept through Rome. It lasted six days, destroying most of the central part of the city and killing thousands of people. Nero had often said that Rome was a filthy pigsty, and needed to be cleansed. He wanted to build a magnificent city of marble in its place. The first emperor, Augustus, said that he had found Rome a city of wood and left it a city of marble. This was true of the central part around the Forum, but the majority of the city still consisted of wooden tenements. Rome in the mid-first century AD was a tinderbox.

It is tradition that Nero started the fire and “fiddled” as the city burned, but most historians believe that the fire was an accident. In that firetrap of a city all it would have taken was a tipped-over cooking brazier to get it started, and even if there had been a fire department there would have been little chance of stopping it.¹ As for Nero’s “fiddling,” he fancied himself to be a great actor and a world-class musician. One of his favorite performances was to play the lyre and recite an epic poem about the burning of Troy. It is entirely possible that as he watched Rome burning from a parapet of his villa on Palatine Hill, he played and recited that poem. When the people heard about that they were furious and accused him of starting the fire in order to clear the ground for his Golden House.²

Nero started rebuilding the city in marble, spending huge amounts of money that he did not have in order to do it. Very quickly, however, his attention became more and more focused on his own palace. It is apparent that he had been mentally unstable from the beginning of his reign, but the fire tipped him over the edge into compete madness. The three people who kept him under control were his mother, Agrippina (whom he detested), his wife Pompeia (to whom he was devoted) and his tutor Seneca. He finally murdered his mother, kicked Pompeia do death in a fit of rage, and exiled Seneca. Thereafter nothing

¹ Actually, there was a fire department. The original was privately owned and operated by Marcus Licinius Crassus (115-53 BC), the richest man in Rome (and possibly in the world). It is alleged that he got his first wealth by selling “fire insurance.” If you refused to buy it, your tenement usually caught fire soon thereafter. When a tenement caught fire his fire department was usually conveniently nearby, but would not fight the fire until the owner had paid up. Similar fire departments existed in Nero’s time.

² As the crowds grew increasingly ugly it became apparent that Nero needed a scapegoat. The perfect victims were the Christians, who were looked on by most of the people as a weird sect of fanatics who had no respect for the gods who protected Rome. Nero accused them of starting the fire, and began his persecution of them. Nero’s persecution of the Christians had almost nothing to do with religion. It was simply that he needed a scapegoat, and the Christians were the convenient candidates.

controlled him. He diverted all of Rome's finances into the building of his palace. When there was no money left he forced the richest Romans to leave him everything in their wills, and soon thereafter they would "commit suicide." This money he used to build his *Domus Aurea*, his "Golden House."

Suetonius wrote of it, "Of its dimensions and furniture, it may be sufficient to say this much: the porch was so high that there stood in it a colossal statue of himself a hundred and twenty feet in height; and the space included in it was so ample, that it had triple porticos a mile in length, and a lake like a sea, surrounded with buildings which had the appearance of a city" (*Nero*, 31:1). Later that statue, known as the *Colossus Neronis*, stood outside the Flavian Amphitheater that was subsequently called the Colosseum, until sometime in the 4th century AD. It then disappeared, probably melted down for its bronze.

The palace covered 125 acres spreading over the Palatine, Esquiline and Caelian hills. It included the main palace building, sprawling gardens, a huge artificial lake, and dozens of smaller buildings. The palace itself was cutting-edge architecture, made of concrete vaulted arches¹ overlaid with marble and gold. The floors were beautiful mosaics, and the walls were decorated with Pompeian style paintings and mosaics. As with most Roman architecture, there was a strong Greek influence lavishly decorated with exquisite columns, flourishes and friezes. There were hundreds of the most precious Greek and Roman statues placed throughout the buildings and gardens.

Sadly for the world of art but as a blessing for the people of ancient Rome, after Nero's death Vespasian dismantled and sold the Golden House, paid the debts, and restored most of the land to the city. From contemporary descriptions, however, it is evident that even Louis XIV's Versailles and Beijing's Forbidden City pale in comparison to Nero's Golden House.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Roman technology developed amazing forms of concrete that were in many ways superior to the best concrete we have today. They also invented the arch, vault and dome, all of which were used in the Golden House.

“Receive the Holy Spirit”

Saint John tells us that on the evening of the day of the Resurrection Jesus appeared to the Apostles when they were huddled in fear and confusion, breathed on them, and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn. 20:22). It was not until seven weeks later, however, that the Holy Spirit came upon them on Pentecost. We identify that event as the beginning of the Church and the revelation to them of the True Faith and of their mission (Acts 2:1ff). At which event, then, did Christ actually bestow the Holy Spirit? The answer is, of course, at both.

At the Sacrament of Holy Baptism we become one with Christ in his Church, and as such we are united not only with God the Son, but also with the Father and the Holy Spirit, so we can say that we receive the Holy Spirit at that time. At the Sacrament of Holy Confirmation we take upon ourselves the full responsibility for our own life in Christ, and receive the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit to enable this.¹ A few receive specific gifts and spiritual authority if they are ordained to the priesthood, and again if they are consecrated to the episcopate.² In the same way, it is generally acknowledged that when Christ breathed on the Apostles and bestowed on them the Holy Spirit, this was effectively their ordination. In the next verse he said to them, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn. 20:23). This statement acknowledges the Church’s authority through her priests to absolve sins in the Name of God.

The ultimate bestowal of the Holy Spirit, of course, was at the first Christian Pentecost, when the Church was established and the Faith deposited with the Apostles.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit are Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Holy Fear (Awe) of God.

² These gifts of ordination enable the recipient to fulfil particular duties and responsibilities. They in no way elevate him to a superior position in the eyes of God. If anything, they humble him to a position of servitude. It is well for those of us who are ordained to remember this always.

“For Fear of the Jews”

This most unfortunate translation of John 20:19 and other similar passages has brought more misery into the world than practically any other. The problem is not the passages, but their translation, which some use to exacerbate the anti-Semitism that has been a scourge in the world for thousands of years. The Greek that is translated “the Jews” (and the equivalent in most other languages) is *hoi Ioudaion* (οἱ Ἰουδαίων). While this does literally mean “the Jews,” in the Greek idiom it did not mean the Jewish people, but the religious and political leaders. Most of them had sold out to the Romans, were notably corrupt, and were feared and hated by the common Jewish people.

Rome was no friend of Judaism or of the Jewish people. The rich and powerful, however, had for the most part (there were notable exceptions) cooperated with Rome in exchange for a lavish lifestyle and the maintaining of their power. These were mainly the chief Temple priests and the political rulers, including the royal house of Herod and the Sanhedrin. Jesus and his teachings were a threat to them. These men would be held responsible for any disruption in the system, and Rome was very unhappy about disruptions. When Rome was unhappy its retribution was fierce, and this would endanger not only these men’s status and lifestyle, but possibly even their lives. They had to get rid of Jesus at any cost. Even after his crucifixion his followers were a threat to them, and this is why the Apostles feared *hoi Ioudaion*, these corrupt leaders. They had no fear of the ordinary Jewish people, many of whom had been followers of Jesus for the three years of his ministry.

The unfortunate translation of *hoi Ioudaion* as “the Jews” instead of “the Jewish leaders” has led to centuries of anti-Semitic evil, climaxing in the Holocaust. It was these corrupt leaders, not the people, who called for his crucifixion—notwithstanding, ignorant people for centuries have laid the blame on all the Jews of the world. This is sinful and contemptible. It is the sin of all mankind, not that of the Jews, that killed Jesus.

Richard R. Losch+

The Feast of Pentecost

Pentecost is second only to Easter among the most important of Christian feasts, yet in modern times it is one of the most neglected. It is important because it is the climax of the whole sequence of divine acts that is theologically known as the “Christ Event.” This begins with the Annunciation and Conception of Jesus, goes through his birth, life and ministry, concludes with his Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, and is then climaxed with the giving of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Church on Pentecost. None of these events has any eternal significance apart from the context of all the others, thus the sequence is called the Christ Event. Possibly one of the reasons that Pentecost is so often neglected and taken for granted is that after the Ascension Jesus was no longer visibly present in history. He is physically present, of course, in the Blessed Sacrament, but his Real Presence there is perceived through faith, not through empirical and visible evidence.

Pentecost was the Jewish festival of *Shavu'oth* (שבועות), the Feast of Weeks. In Greek it was known as Pentecost, from the Greek for fifty. It celebrates the seven weeks from the night of the first Passover until the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai on the fiftieth day. In Jesus' time it was a major festival that concluded the Passover season. Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world would travel, some for months, to come to Jerusalem for Passover at least once in their lives.¹ Having made such an arduous journey, many would stay in Jerusalem for the full seven weeks in order also to celebrate *Shavu'oth* before returning home. This is why there were such huge crowds in Jerusalem when Peter preached to them on the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2:5ff).

After the Crucifixion the Apostles (and most of Jesus'

¹ To this day each year at the end of the Seder, the Passover meal, Jews say, “Next Year in Jerusalem.” It is the dream of every religious Jew to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem at least once. This undoubtedly inspired Muhammad to imitate it by mandating that every Muslim must make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his life.

followers) assumed that all was lost—it was over, and their work had been a failure. After the Resurrection their hopes were restored, but they still understood little. They, like so many others, remained in Jerusalem until Pentecost instead of returning to Galilee (they were all Galileans except Judas, who was now dead). They were gathered “all together in one place,” undoubtedly to pray before going to the Temple to offer the required *Shavu'oth* sacrifices. They were, after all, still Jews. Judaism and Christianity would not finally go their separate ways until several years later. The Bible does not tell us who were there. There is little doubt, however, that it was not just the twelve Apostles (Matthias had been chosen to replace Judas by that time). There likely would have been other close disciples there, including the women who had long traveled with them—among them the Blessed Virgin, Mary Magdalene, Salome, and perhaps Susanna and Joanna. Possibly even Joseph Barsabbas (the other nominee to replace Judas), and Jesus' personal friends Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha were there.

As they were gathered there, confused but ready to deal with whatever God gave them to do, there was suddenly a sound of a rushing wind, and tongues of flame appeared over their heads. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and in a moment everything fell into place. For the first time they clearly understood what Jesus had been teaching them. This moment is deemed to be the beginning of the Church. The understanding that came upon them is called the Deposit of Faith, which is the body of all revealed truth that is necessary for the earthly Church to know in order for her to teach what is required for the salvation of souls. This does not mean that these disciples immediately became master theologians, but that there was deposited in them and their spiritual descendants (mainly the bishops) all the understanding and wisdom that is necessary to discern truth. It took many, many years of hammering out and refining theological points through the Councils of the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, before the full body of the Church's official doctrines was firmed up, and that process is still going on. Notwithstanding, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic

Church with all its doctrines was created and revealed on that first Christian Pentecost in Jerusalem.

As a sign of their being filled with the Holy Spirit, many of the disciples began speaking in strange languages, a phenomenon known as “speaking in tongues.” Many modern Pentecostal denominations practice this, but for the most part what they do is quite different from what happened in Jerusalem that day. Modern “speaking in tongues” usually consists of speaking a stream of incomprehensible syllables that oftentimes even the speaker does not understand. The Bible makes it clear that the “tongues” must be understood by interpreters or they are not to be spoken. When the disciples spoke in tongues it attracted a large crowd. That crowd was made up of pilgrims from all over the known world, who spoke a wide variety of languages. The amazing thing to them was that whatever their native language was, they heard the disciples speaking in that language—when Peter spoke, the Judeans heard him speaking in Aramaic, the Greeks in Greek, the Romans in Latin, the Persians in Farsi, and so on (Acts 2:5ff). That Pentecost was the undoing of Babel. At Babel the people were separated and scattered because no one understood anyone else’s language. On Pentecost, on the other hand, the people were united in that everyone understood what was being said regardless of their language.

The indication that this band of confused and frightened disciples were filled with understanding is in Peter’s sermon to the crowd. That barely-educated fisherman who a few weeks earlier had been too frightened to admit that he even knew Jesus, now stood before a huge crowd, many of whom were hostile, and preached a sermon so powerful that on that morning three thousand were baptized (Acts 2:14ff). Thereafter the Apostles and other disciples went forth preaching and proselytizing, most going ultimately to a martyr’s death.

The Feast of Pentecost, then, celebrates the institution of the Church, the Deposit of Faith with the Apostles, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide and protect the Church for all time.

Richard R. Losch+

In the Beginning

Sometimes the amount of information that can be gleaned from a single verse of the Bible is staggering. To discover it all, of course, requires a great deal of study, reflection, research of what others have seen in it, knowledge of the cultural and religious background of the passage, and at least a basic familiarity with the original language in which it was written. While much of this is not readily available to the average Bible reader, what is available is the ability to pray about and meditate on the passage. This alone can provide amazing insights.

The first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Believers tend to take this for granted, whether they believe it took six days or billions of years, but if we look at the statement carefully we come to realize that it crashed into the religious world of the time like a bomb. This was the first completely monotheistic concept in history.¹ Every other known culture in the world believed in multiple gods, each having his own realm of authority in nature or culture. There were gods of rain, trees, rocks, clouds, thunder, war, peace, discord, harmony, wisdom, and on and on. Gods were created by other gods, either sexually or by emerging from their bodies, and gods could die from natural disaster or at the hand of other gods. In effect they were just superhumans. In many ancient pagan religions humans were not created by gods, but emerged from what was left of the chaos from which the gods themselves originally emerged. In some religions humans were created either to serve the gods or as their playthings. Nature had existed forever in total chaos, and eventually organized itself and produced the first gods.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This was a clear refutation of the basic premise of every other

¹ Akhenaton's short-lived Atonism in 4th century BC Egypt, while some think it may have influenced Moses' Egyptian upbringing, was not a truly monotheistic religion. It was a monotheistic refinement of paganism. Aton, although believed to be the only god, was not the creator of all things. He arose from an already existing nature, and thus was a part of it.

religion, that the gods came from a nature that already existed. The God of the Hebrews¹ created nature, not the other way around. When an artist creates something he does so by re-arranging materials that already exist—pigments on canvas, a block of stone, a lump of clay, musical tones, etc. The Hebrew word that we translate “created” is *bara* (ברא). This means to make something out of nothing. It means to bring something into existence, not to re-form existing things into something new. This was a unique concept in ancient religion. God is completely apart from nature, and is its creator. He is not a natural God, he is supernatural—above and apart from nature. In the Genesis account he calls the heavens and earth into existence, and then creates (*bara*) energy (“Let there be light”). The rest of his creation is like that of an artist, using the materials that he had created—making man from the dust of the earth.

The word that we translate as “In the beginning” is *breshith* (בראשית), and it implies again the start of something from nothing. Notice that its root is *bara* (ברא), to bring something into existence out of nothing. It means a real beginning, before which there was nothing (but God, of course). In our limited temporal thinking, when something begins there was always something before that beginning. That is because we are temporal—we live in the continuum of time, and we think only in terms of time. Things have beginnings and endings, but there is always something before each beginning and something after each ending. Even science faces that enigma. We can explain how everything in existence was brought about by something that preceded it, until we crash into the stone wall of the “singularity”—the cosmic whatever-it-was that exploded in the Big Bang and produced the universe. Time was brought into existence at the Big Bang, so what was there “before” time existed? Believers know what was there. It was God, who

¹ The God of the Hebrews first revealed himself to Abraham, whose descendants eventually became the Israelites. In time the Torah was revealed to them, and from this revelation developed the faith that we call Judaism. Out of Judaism arose Christianity. Thus the God of the Hebrews is the God of Jews and Christians, even though our understanding of him may differ.

encompasses everything before creation and after the end of all things. Jesus said, “I am the *alpha* and the *omega*, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 21:6; also 1:8 and 22:13). Alpha (Α) and Omega (Ω) are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, before and after which there are no letters.¹ We acknowledge this in the liturgy when we say, “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.”

One other thing that we can see in this first verse of the Bible is that God has no reason to bring about creation other than that he simply wants to. As we can see throughout the rest of the Bible, the reason that he wants to is because of his infinite love. He loves all his creatures, and despises nothing that he has made (he may despise some of the things that his creatures do, but he does not despise any of his creatures). The gods of the pagan religions were capricious and often cruel and hateful. They toyed with mankind, granted vengeance but no justice, held whole peoples responsible for the sins of one individual, and inflicted great suffering on people and whole nations just for their own entertainment. Oedipus and all his descendants were punished because he unwittingly did exactly what the gods intended for him to do. The Hebrew God is totally different: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8). That is the God of Genesis 1:1, and the God of the whole Bible.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last six years of *The Epistle*, including this issue, are now online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Jesus, who spoke Aramaic, actually would have said, “I am the *alef* and the *tav*.” *Alef* (א) and *tav* (ת) are the first and last letters of the Hebrew/Aramaic alphabet.

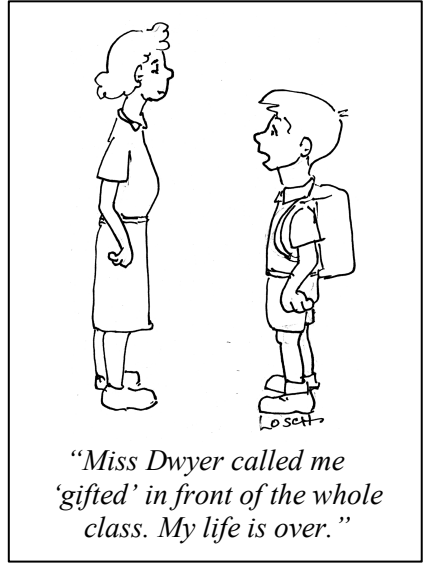
A Touch of Trivia

The atom bomb was one of the most critical inventions of the 20th century. It ended World War II and launched decades of a dread of nuclear annihilation. H. G. Wells predicted it in 1913 in his novel *The World Set Free*. He described cities being obliterated by what he called “atomic bombs,” and he even described the mushroom clouds and long-lasting residual radiation. He chose his own epitaph, although his heirs chose not to use it: “I told you so. You damned fools”

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JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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