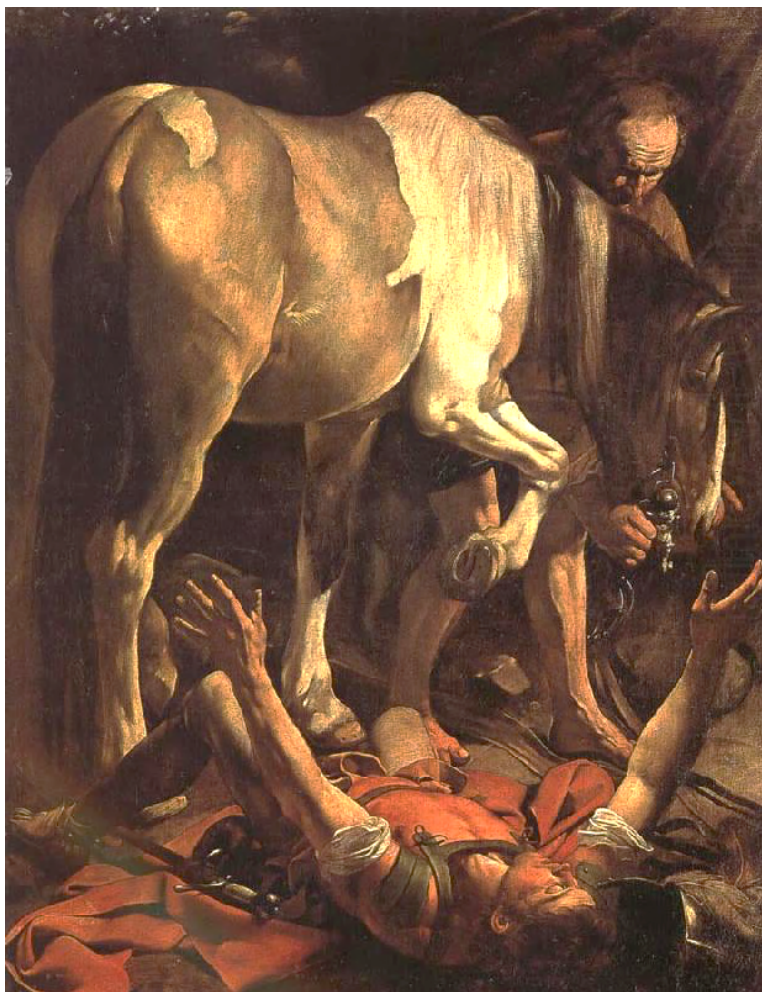


THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is Caravaggio's *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, completed 1601. It is oil on a cypress panel, and measures 7'9"x6'2". It is displayed in the Odescalchi Balbi Collection in Rome. It was originally commissioned along with *The Crucifixion of Saint Peter*, by Monsignor (later Cardinal) Tiberio Cerasi, Treasurer to Pope Clement VIII. It depicts Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, on his mission to exterminate the Christian community there. He has fallen from his horse after being blinded by a vision of Christ (Acts 22:6ff). Although the commemoration of this on January 25 is called the Conversion of Saint Paul, it was not a true conversion. Conversion implies changing from one religion to another. Paul lived and died a faithful Jew. He never renounced Judaism, but rather saw Christ as the prophesied Messiah, the fulfillment of Judaism, who established a new Covenant between God and all mankind through the Jews. The earliest Christians called their movement "The Way," and thought of it as a sect of Judaism. Paul's only conversion was from a being a Jew who hated The Way to a being Jew who believed and promoted it.

Michele Angelo Amerighi da Caravaggio (1571-1610), commonly known simply as Caravaggio, was an Italian painter who trained in Milan, but who spend most of his artistic life in Rome. During the last four years of his life, he moved around between Naples, Malta and Sicily. His works are most noted for their natural portrayal of human life and his dramatic use of lighting. Unlike most painters of his time, he did not use preliminary drawings and cartoons (line sketches), but preferred to work with live models and create directly on the canvas. He had a reputation not only as a master artist, but also as a violent

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and quick-tempered man. A brawl in 1606 in which a man died at his hand earned him a death sentence for murder, causing him to flee to Naples (a separate kingdom in those days). In Naples he was recognized as one of the leading painters of his time, but in 1607 he moved to Malta and then Sicily, where he sought a papal pardon from his death sentence. Failing that, he returned to Naples in 1609, but another brawl disfigured his face and raised questions about his mental state. Rumors of his death circulated. In 1610 he died under suspicious circumstances. The official reports were that he died of a fever, but it was widely believed that he was murdered by someone whom he had offended in one of his many violent altercations.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

Merry Christmas! No, I am not behind the times. Despite the secular celebration that began shortly after Halloween, Christmas did not actually begin until sundown December 24, and it isn't over yet. The Feast of the Nativity (Christmas) lasts for the Octave (eight days) through January 1; the Christmas Festival lasts until the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6, and the Christmas Season runs until the Feast of the Purification on February 2, so you may continue wishing you friends a Merry Christmas until February—it's a great teaching opportunity. For all the hardness, selfishness and cruelty in today's world, there is something about Christmas, even the completely secular celebration of it, that brings out the best in people, even those who grumble about all the work and expense. It is a time of warmth, happiness and cheer. I would have no problem with Santas, reindeer, and Christmas trees all year around if we could maintain that spirit throughout the year. It may be a judgment on us as Christians that we respond more joyfully to a secular festival that grew out of a Christian one than we do to the Good News of the Gospel. The early Christian apologist Tertullian wrote, "The heathen were wont to exclaim with astonishment, 'Behold how these Christians love one another, and how they are

ready to die for one another.” I wonder if he would write the same thing today. If we as Christians strove to generate the same joy throughout the year as the secular feast generates for a brief time annually, perhaps he would. It is something to think about and pray about.

Father Rick Losch

Be Wordly Wise

Plurals and Possessives

English, it is said, is second only to Cantonese Chinese as the hardest language for a non-native speaker to master. It is a stew of many languages that have contributed to its original Germanic source (Anglo-Saxon). This has produced countless linguistic inconsistencies, especially when it comes to plurals. The ESL student is faced with one ox, two oxen, but one box, two boxes. Then he learns that the plural of hoof is hooves, but of roof is roofs, and that we have goose/geese, moose/moose, and mongoose/mongoose. It is often correct to use the original plural of a Greek or Latin word (criterion/criteria, datum/data), but it is sometimes preferable with foreign words to use the English system of adding -s or -es to make a plural. Using the original plural can be pretentious and pedantic (as in pendula for pendulums, or octopodes for octopuses¹). The safest rule of thumb is that when in doubt, just add -s or -es. A common error today, as incorrect as using nucular for nuclear, is using an apostrophe in a plural. The plural of key is keys, never key's. The Smith family are then Smiths, not the Smith's. An apostrophe indicates a possessive, as in "Mr. Smith's keys." There are two cases in which an apostrophe is acceptable in a plural. One is in a phrase such as "all the A's in Alabama" or "all the 2's in that data set," but even then an apostrophe is not required. The other case is in a plural possessive, as in "the

¹ The plural octopi, although very common, is never correct. It adds a plural Latin suffix to a singular Greek word, creating a false form. The Greek plural of octopus is octopodes, but the preferred English form is octopuses.

books' covers" (the covers of the books), but that is really nothing more than the combining of the plural and possessive rules in one word. There is one more consideration in possessives. If the word ends in s, its possessive¹ does not require another s, although it is not wrong to use one. For example, either "Jesus' life" or "Jesus's life" would be correct.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

There are about 1 to 2 million animal species on earth, of which fewer than 6500 are mammals. Of these, 21% (over 1/5) are bats. These amazing creatures range in size from the 1-inch bumblebee bat (the smallest of all mammals) to the flying fox, with a wing-span of over 5 feet. While the small bats (which scientists call microbats) are nocturnal and navigate by echolocation, the largest of them (megabats) live in the tropics and are diurnal, relying on sight and smell to navigate and find prey. Most bats rest hanging upside-down, enabling them to launch into flight instantly; but 6 species have suction cups on their feet that enable them to attach themselves to leaves or branches, sleeping in any position. Bats are second only to bees as essential plant pollinators, and they can deliver pollen several times as far from the source as bees do. They are also the world's most efficient insect controllers, and are about twice as effective as birds in dropping viable seeds onto barren land. Without bats, a large portion of plant species would be extinct, and the population of flying insects would more than double.

Richard R. Losch+

You do not have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body.

—C. S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity"

¹ Here we have another English anomaly that adds to the confusion and leads to a common error. It's a possessive means belonging to it, but it should not have an apostrophe. It's with an apostrophe is a contraction for it is. "When in the ocean, it's dangerous to ignore its riptides." In English, as soon as you learn a rule you will probably find an exception.

Peter's House in Capernaum

Capernaum was a small fishing village on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. The gospels tell us that it was the home town of Peter and his brother Andrew, and of their business partners Zebedee and his sons, James and John. Most important, however, is that after Jesus was rejected in Nazareth (Lk. 4:14ff), he made his home in Capernaum (Matt. 4:13).¹ It was there that he called his first disciples, including Peter, and that for all practical purposes he began the three-year ministry (Mark 1:21ff) that culminated in his death, resurrection and ascension. We do not know for sure where in the town he lived, but from many clues it is likely that it was in Peter's house (Matt. 8:14ff, Lk. 4:38, Mk. 1:29). This is corroborated by the ancient tradition that a Byzantine church in Capernaum, whose ruins are still there, actually stood over the remains of Peter's house. Although it is impossible to be 100% sure, recent archaeological finds lend additional credence to this tradition.

The location of the synagogue in Capernaum where Jesus taught has long been known, although it is not clear whether the excavated building was the one he knew, or is a later replacement. The location of Peter's home, however, remained a mystery. That is, until excavations of a relatively unimportant (or so they thought) octagonal Byzantine martyrium church² revealed that it stood over a building that had been a private home that dated to the 1st century AD. It was slightly larger than most homes of the period, but it was nonetheless a crude and simple dwelling, with beaten earth floors, course unplastered walls and a roof of earth and straw. Peter owned his own boat, so we know that he was relatively successful in the fishing business. It would therefore not be surprising that his

¹ This was probably not by chance. There is strong circumstantial evidence that James and John were Jesus' first cousins, and if so, that he would have known the town (and perhaps Peter and Andrew) from childhood.

² A martyrium church is a small church built as a shrine to honor a martyr. This Byzantine church was in ruins and it was not clear to which martyr it was dedicated, until the excavation revealed that it probably was Peter.

house, although simple, was somewhat larger than usual. It was like most Roman era houses, consisting of a few small rooms centered around two open courtyards. Even though it was one of the most exciting biblical archaeological discoveries of recent times, the house was quite ordinary. It would not have attracted much archaeological attention except for its transformation after the middle of the 1st century. Those changes confirm that it was very probably the home of Peter, and the home of Jesus after he moved to Capernaum in about AD 30.

Sometime in the mid-1st century the walls of the main room were plastered from floor to ceiling. This was quite unusual for a Galilean house of the time. The usual pottery ware for cooking, eating and household storage was replaced by large stone jars and oil lamps. These changes indicate that the building was no longer used as a family residence, but had been converted into a meeting place for community gatherings. This would have been at about the same time that the Jews no longer accepted the Christians as a sect of Judaism, and were expelling them from the synagogues. It was long before there were any special buildings that could be called churches, and Christians met in private homes. It appears that this house was such a place, and that since Jesus and Peter were now gone, Peter's house was an ideal spot to be set up as a permanent center for the Christians to assemble and worship. This may have been one of the first ever Christian churches.

In the centuries that followed, the plastered room was renovated into the main hall of a rudimentary church. The stone walls were buttressed to support a two-story high arch and a stone roof. The walls were re-plastered and painted with floral and geometric designs. Today we consider graffiti to be vulgar vandalism, but in ancient Rome it was extremely common and accepted. This also came to be a part of the culture of the Roman Middle Eastern provinces. The walls of the church at Peter's house were covered with Greek, Aramaic, Hebrew and Syriac graffiti such as "Lord Jesus Christ help my servant," and "Christ have mercy." There were also many graffiti crosses,

and one boat, probably representative of Peter as a fisherman. Some excavators claim that Peter's name is mentioned in several of the graffiti, but others dispute this claim. This rudimentary church seems to have survived and been active until the middle of the 4th century, when the octagonal Byzantine church replaced it. Fortunately for us, that church was built on top of the old house/church instead of removing and replacing it.

In ancient history there is little that can be absolutely certain, but reason indicates that there is a high likelihood that this was indeed the home of Peter and Jesus. Spots associated with Jesus were remembered and revered by the earliest Christians, many of whom knew Peter and Jesus personally. These traditions were passed down over the generations, and when corroborated by other events, layers of circumstantial evidence, and modern archaeology, they can often be trusted.

Richard R. Losch+

The Biblical Tattoo Taboo

The Torah states it pretty clearly: “You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:28). Modern puritans are quick to latch on to that verse to condemn the current tattooing fad, claiming that tattooing is not only vulgar and tasteless, but also un-Christian. Whether it is vulgar and tasteless is purely a matter of aesthetics, but there is no justification for calling it un-Christian.¹ It is un-Jewish, perhaps, since it is against the Law, but there is no mention of it in the New Testament, pro or con.

This raises the question of why this Levitical ban was made. Some have suggested that its proximity to the ban of gashing the flesh for the dead indicates that tattooing may also have

¹ I admit that I am prejudiced against tattooing, but I cannot honestly offer any reasonable social or theological argument against it. The best I can say is that since God created our bodies, it is hubristic and disrespectful to think that we can beautify them more with “ink.” This is a weak argument, however. If that is true, then it is also hubristic and disrespectful to think we can beautify our bodies more with clothing, cosmetics or jewelry.

been a pagan rite of mourning. A common pagan Middle-Eastern mourning practice was to gash the face with the fingernails (often permanently scarring it). Some interpreters say that these rites also involved tattooing. That does not hold up, however, since there is no mention in the Bible or any other ancient Middle-Eastern literature to substantiate that claim. There are many ancient references to tattooing, just none pertaining to mourning or funeral practices.

It seems that the most likely reason for the ban is that while many cultures practiced tattooing for many reasons, including simply adorning the body, it was also closely associated with slavery. Every ancient culture, including the Jews, had slavery. In many places, including Egypt, slaves were tattooed with the name or token of their owner either on the forehead or the hand. This made it easy to identify and return runaways.¹ When this Levitical law was first laid down, the Israelites had only recently escaped from Egypt. Although most scholars believe that they were not actually slaves in Egypt, their condition of forced labor was not all that different from real slavery. They were now free from their Egyptian oppressors, and they wanted nothing that even hinted of being slaves—thus tattoos, which among other things were signs of ownership, were banned.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

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Richard R. Losch+

¹ In the early 1st century BC the Romans abandoned the practice, at least that of tattooing them on places that were easily seen in public. They realized that if the slaves discovered how numerous they were (in many cities they greatly outnumbered free men), they might revolt. When slaves were out in public they usually looked like any other lower-class Roman.

The Ending of Mark's Gospel

Many readers think that the last twelve verses of the Gospel According to Saint Mark (16:9-20) do not seem to be consistent with the rest of the gospel,¹ and they are quite right. If we read them in the original Greek, it is evident that they differ significantly from the writer's Greek in the main body of the book,² raising the suggestion that they might be a much later addition written by a different author. Some call them a forgery, but that word is a bit harsh when we consider the culture of the time, because the word forgery implies dishonesty. In ancient times it was not considered either dishonest or fraudulent to write in someone else's name as long as you were sure that what you were writing was completely consistent with his thinking and teaching. This seems to be the case here.

Archaeology has found many very early Greek copies of all the gospels, and among the earliest of these are copies of Mark that end with verse 16:8. There is little doubt that the last verses (16:9-20) are a later addition. With only 16 chapters this is the shortest of all the gospels,³ and it is possible that the writer died before he finished the work. If the writer was indeed John Mark, however, this is not the case, as Luke mentions him several times in the Book of Acts, and there are references to a living Mark in several of the epistles. It is also possible that there was originally some additional text that has been lost. If so, however, it was lost very early, because there is no mention of it even by the earliest Christian writers. However, there were three different endings that were known as early as the beginning of the 3rd century. Two of these are so clearly later addi-

¹ The Gospel (uppercase G) is the message of salvation taught by Jesus Christ. A gospel (lowercase g) is an account of that Gospel.

² We refer to "the writer" rather than to Mark, because despite the ancient tradition, we do not know who actually wrote the book. It could have been John Mark, who was a disciple of Jesus (but not an Apostle). Early tradition says that it was, but there is no evidence to confirm that.

³ Matthew has 28 chapters, Luke 24, and John 21.

tions that they were rejected even in ancient times, but the third is still found in many Bibles today. Some identify these verses as questionable (NIV, NRSV), while others simply print them as if they were part of the original (KJV). The reason for writing these endings is that some ancient readers felt that the book was deficient, ending too abruptly and leaving the reader “hanging.” They added a few more verses to tidy things up.

Mark’s gospel was written several decades earlier than the other three, and it was clearly one of the sources for Matthew and Luke. When the Bible was canonized in the 4th century, the Church leaders knew that, yet they did not place it first in the series. Contemporary writings show that they recognized it as valid and authoritative, but they also considered it deficient. It told nothing of Jesus’ birth and early life, did not put any emphasis on his divinity, and mentioned no post-Resurrection appearances. For that reason, they chose to place it after Matthew. Even at that time they questioned the validity of the last verses, but by that time they were so well known and popular that they decided to include them anyway. Saint Jerome included them in the Latin Vulgate, and some authorized Roman Catholic translations still carry them today. For the same reason, the compilers of the King James Version decided to include them as well, even though they knew they were likely not part of the original. Those verses are so well known and beloved today that many Christians consider them to be an authentic part of Sacred Scripture. Many devotees of the KJV will accuse you of heresy or Modernism if you suggest that they are not.

These added verses, although clearly not authentic, are in no way inconsistent with the teachings of the rest of the New Testament, and therefore do not present any theological conflicts or contradictions. The only restriction on them is that they should never be used to substantiate any doctrine or theological point, and in personal Bible study they should be recognized for what they are. While they are familiar and beloved by many, they are not a true part of Sacred Scripture.

Richard R. Losch+

The Miracle at Bethesda

One of Jesus' more spectacular public miracles was performed at the Pool of Bethesda¹ in Jerusalem. A man who had been paralyzed for 38 years waited at the pool where legend maintained that healing took place (John 5:2ff). Jesus came to him unbidden, and commanded him to stand up, take up his bed (a straw mat), and walk. The man did so, and thus incurred the wrath of the Pharisees. It was the Sabbath, and they said that Jesus had broken the Sabbath by healing on that day, and that the man had broken the Sabbath by carrying his bed.

Many Bible readers are familiar with the verse that says that the people believed an angel would come down and roil the water, and the first person who entered the water afterward would be healed of any disease or infirmity (John 5:4).² That verse is not found in any of the earliest manuscripts of John. It is clearly a later gloss, added by some scribe to try to make sense out of why the sick were waiting at the pool.³

Since the beginning of Biblical Criticism, many scholars have argued that this story is a myth or allegory, because there was no evidence that such a place as the Pool of Bethesda ever existed. They thought that it was no more than an ancient legend. Until fairly recently, when John has been almost completely exonerated by several archaeological finds, he was accused of ignorance of Jerusalem or of playing fast and loose with geographical and historical facts. He is now considered to be accurate on most points. John says that the pool had five

¹ The Greek is *Bethzatha* (Βηθζαθά). It is usually rendered Bethesda, but in Hebrew it is *Bethsadah* (בֵּית שַׁדַּי), which some render *Bethzatha* or *Bethsaida*. It means House of Mercy or of Grace. This is not the same as the village of Bethsaida where Jesus healed the blind man (Mark 8:22).

² "For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had" (John 5:4, KJV). In modern editions of the Bible that verse is omitted or identified as not authentic.

³ We have the same situation with the additional verses at the end of Mark (16:9-20; see the preceding article above).

colonnades, so it was supposed that it was a pentagonal pool. Nothing even close to that had ever been found by archaeologists. In 1888, however, a rectangular pool was uncovered in Jerusalem that had a large colonnade banked by two others on each side, making five. It fits John's description perfectly. Archaeologists have no doubt that this was indeed John's Pool of Bethesda. The only question then is what was its original purpose? Such pools in Judea usually had one of three purposes. It would have been a mikveh (a ritual cleansing pool for a Jewish form of baptism), a royal swimming pool (Herod had several), or a reservoir for the city's water supply. Its distance from the Temple and palace makes it unlikely that it was a mikveh or swimming pool. Other evidence indicates that it was probably a reservoir. There are remains of a channel that may have led water into the city, and there is a sluice gate that enables control of the water level in the pool (this fact is important, as we shall see below). The question then remains, if this was a reservoir, how did it become associated with divine healing?

The god Aesculapius was the Greek god of healing. Because he was one of the few gods who had compassion for humans, his cult was very popular throughout the Greco-Roman world. The ancient version of a hospital was a shrine to him called an Aesculapion. This was usually a temple or a sacred pavilion of some sort. The critically sick would go there to be treated by the Aesculapian priests, and to sacrifice to the god in hope of being cured. There were over 400 Aesculapia throughout the empire. Ancient documents indicate that there was one in Jerusalem, although its location was unknown. It seems more than reasonable that it was at the Pool of Bethesda. A pagan shrine in Jerusalem would not at all have pleased faithful Jews such as the Pharisees, but it would not have bothered the Hellenized Jews, and would have been welcomed by the Romans. The Pool of Bethesda, with its covered colonnades, would have been a perfect spot for an Aesculapion. The priests would have accepted the responsibility for maintaining and operating the reservoir, and the Roman authorities would

have been happy to be relieved of the duty. The hygienic problem of the sick going into the city's water supply would not have been recognized in ancient times. If there is any validity to the scribe's gloss about an angel roiling the water (5:4), it can be explained by the fact that from time to time the sluice gates would have been opened to replenish the reservoir's water level, and that would have stirred up the waters of the pool.

The final question that arises is that if this was indeed a pagan shrine, why would Jesus have gone there? The answer is simple. Although most of the sick there were probably pagan gentiles (mainly Romans, Greeks and Syrians), the place also attracted many Jews who were more concerned about their disabling diseases and injuries than about religious restrictions. Jesus taught that he came to seek "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24) and return them to God. The paralytic that he healed was obviously a Jew, or the Pharisees would not have cared that he carried his bed on the Sabbath (John 5:10). Also, he later went to the Temple, where he again met Jesus (v. 14). Jesus went into this pagan place to perform one of his more spectacular public miracles, showing that the power of God even in an ungodly place was greater than the alleged power of any pagan idol, even one as popular as Aesculapius. It was also a clear challenge to the Pharisees and other leaders of the Jews, who John tells us decided that day that they had to kill him (5:18). The important thing to them was not that he had healed on the Sabbath, but that he had healed at all. He demonstrated God's power, which was something they could not even begin to do. His reputation among the people as a prophet was already a threat to their power and authority, and this was the final straw. Throughout Jewish history the rich and powerful leaders under the guise of righteousness had killed the prophets who threatened their position, and it was no different in Jesus' time. It was no longer a question of whether to kill him, but only of when and how. His mission was to die for our sins, and it was now secured that this would be accomplished.

Richard R. Losch+

The Image and Likeness of God

Hebrew, like many Eastern tongues, is a poetic language, often using grammatic constructions to emphasize or explain an idea. One of these devices is parallelism. That is when a word or phrase is followed by a second similar one. We see this many times in the Psalms, where the second part of a verse reflects or restates the first. We also see it in the Creation story, where God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). The word we translate image is *tselem* (צלם), which derives from *tselel* (צל), shadow, reflection or image. A *tselel* is an image of the original, but it is incomplete and therefore only partially accurate. A *tselel* is not exactly the same as the original. The Hebrew parallelism emphasizes this concept by repeating it, this time using the word *demut* (דמות), similarity or likeness. A shadow or a mirror reflection is only an image representing the original, and the use of the word likeness (*demut*, similarity) emphasizes that the image and the original, while similar, are not at all one and the same.

We all know (as did the ancient Israelites who first told this story) that God is pure spirit, and has no physical body. If mankind is in the image and likeness of God, therefore, this must refer to the soul, not to the body. Our body, like our soul, is a creature of God's. If he had so chosen, our body could just as easily have been in the form of a horse, an octopus or a Lorax. It is our soul that is the image of God. Man's soul consists of attributes that are reflections of God's, such as love, compassion, nurturing, creativity, reason, etc. Although our attributes are images of God's and are similar to them, they are only reflections, and do not encompass the full reality of God. We are in God's image and likeness, but we are not God and we are not gods. Also, because of the freedom of will that God gave us, we are capable of corrupting that image and perverting it into falsehood, disobedience and evil. These are not divine attributes and are not in God's image and likeness. They are the result of our abuse of our image of his divine attributes.

Richard R. Losch+

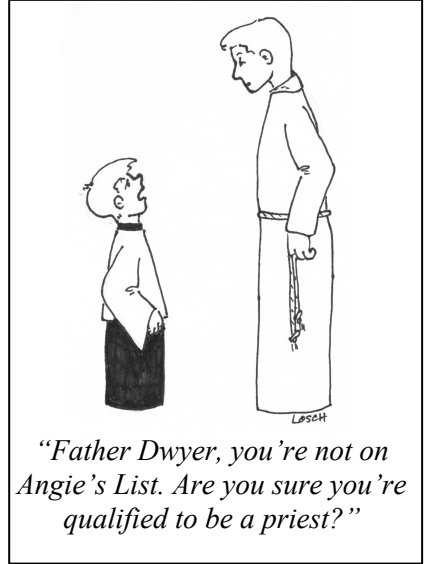
A Touch of Trivia

In 1968, Steven Spielberg dropped out of college in his senior year to pursue a filmmaking career. He re-enrolled in 2001, having already earned most of the required credits for graduation. To meet the final requirement for his advanced filmmaking class, he submitted *Schindler's List*, which had already earned him two Oscars for Best Director and Best Film. In 2002, 37 years after he started, he was awarded a BA in Film and Electronic Arts.

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