

Stirrings



A Basilian Peace & Justice Newsletter

Winter 2017

My prayer on Martin Luther King Jr. Day: Lord, forgive us the sin of patience

by Will Willimon
(Religion News Service
Jan. 16, 2017 nronline.org)

December 1955, Holt Street Baptist Church, Montgomery, Ala. That day, a courageous community activist, Rosa Parks, had been forced off a city bus and jailed.

That night, a hurt, angry crowd of people gathered at Holt Street to discuss the situation.

Speakers noted that what happened that day was simply the way things were done in Montgomery. Racial segregation and white supremacy controlled every aspect of Alabama life. What could anybody do with a man like Big Jim Folsom in charge of the state? Face facts, prominent clergy and laity said as they shook their heads, clenched their fists and lamented.

Then someone turned to the new young preacher in town, fresh from a great run at Morehouse and Boston University, and asked him to say a word. At first he spoke quietly, almost hesitatingly. Then his speech picked up volume: People get tired, he told them, tired of being beaten down, scorned. There comes a time when tired people have had enough. They rise up; they act.

“We have no alternative but to protest,” King said in a speech the next night. “For many years we have shown an amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But

we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice.”

As a participant at that night’s meeting said, “We came there to have a meeting and we left as a movement.” Thus began the Montgomery bus boycott and the civil rights movement — begun because God instigated someone to lose patience, speak up, speak out and act.

Patience is a Christian virtue, to

be sure. But in the present mean-spirited and divisive political climate, and given the disaster on Jan. 20 that we have brought on ourselves, I want to say a good word for impatience.

To my own meager efforts to speak up and speak out, many have responded, “You are not even giving our new president a chance,” or “The time for carping, left-wing criticism is over. You need to back the winner.”

continued on page 2



SIN OF PATIENCE

1

DARKNESS & LIGHT

3

EPIPHANY & EMPIRE

4

CONSCIENCE & ARMY

5

CONSCIENCE & LAW

6

FAITH & TRUTH

8

Stirring: (adjective) exciting, arousing, awakening, animating, quickening

Lord, Anoint Us With A Spirit of Impatience

continued from page 1

There's a time for reconciliation, for prayers for unity and healing. This is not such an hour.

It is not for me to ask that women be reconciled to a man who has publicly, repeatedly wronged them in misogynistic word and deed, a man who boasts of his inability to admit wrong. I'm not the one to tell Hispanic Americans to support a person who built a political powerhouse by lying about them.

We must not allow our silence or passive acquiescence to suggest "we like the way we are being treated."

Let us remember, as we recall the witness of King, that one of the gifts he gave oppressed people was a sense of agency. His powerful words moved a nation from patience, acceptance and facile calls for unity to righteous action.

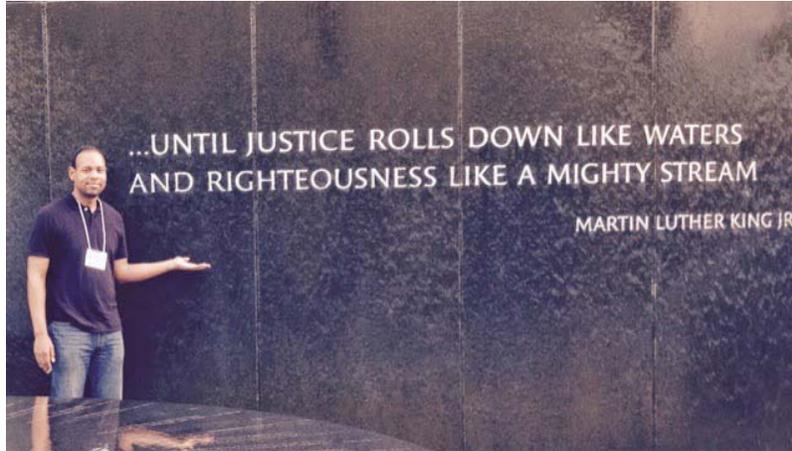
Many urged calm, patience and respectful waiting. I was there so I can tell you. In fact, King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" was written to a predecessor of mine as bishop in Birmingham.

In that letter, King eloquently explained why waiting wasn't the answer and pointedly chided good white liberals for their patient caution and bland moderation.

There is little that I or my family will suffer from rule by the Trump administration. We have health insurance. "Jeff" Sessions can do little to threaten my family. But as a Christian, that's not good enough.

By divine assignment, I'm my brother's keeper. Vulnerable people who are not in my family are my neighbors, and the gifts I've received from God are to be expended in behalf of those in need. Jesus' command to love one another is not a suggestion.

Acquiesce in the face of injustice is not an option that



Jesus permits for those who call him Lord.

From earliest days, Christians suffered political persecution. In the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus puts his people on notice that they will be dragged into court, threatened by kings and incarcerated, he does not urge patience. Jesus dares to give his persecuted, maligned followers a job: "This will be a time for you to witness."

Don't you find that amazing? No sympathy from Jesus for jailing and persecution by the criminal justice system. No exhortation to keep their heads down, their speech civil and deferential. Jesus says that such times can be a God-given opportunity for faithful people to stand up, speak

up and speak out. Jesus dares to call ordinary, vulnerable people to act up in his name. He gives people like us agency.

Is our time such a time? King, like Jesus, has been sanitized and cleaned up in order to be a national hero. But let's not forget that before he became a respectable American icon, he was a Baptist preacher whom

God called to speak up for justice. King risked obedience to God rather than governing authorities and encouraged others to do the same.

Down through history, God's people have had an uncanny sense that times of crisis and disaster are times of vocation in which God gives agency to ordinary people to work for the continuing salvation of the world.

Therefore, this is my prayer:

"Lord, forgive the sin of our patience. Anoint us with a fresh spirit of impatience, that we might be half as angry over political injustice and human meanness as you are, and that, in our impatience, we might be given the guts to do something about it." Amen.

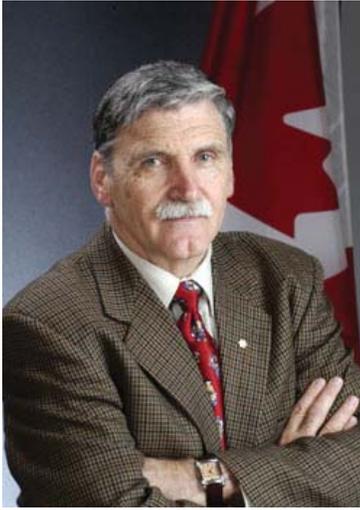
Will Willimon is an American theologian and retired bishop in the United Methodist Church, who served the North Alabama Conference. He is currently Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School.



Stirrings

A Peace & Justice Newsletter
A project of the Basilian Centre for Peace & Justice

Editorial Team
Neil Hibberd, Bob Holmes, Leo Reilly, Maurice Restivo



Romeo Dallaire is an authentic Canadian hero who has been subjected to the severest trials and refuses to be overcome by them. In his latest book, *Waiting for First Light: My Ongoing Struggle with PTSD*, he describes his struggle leading to attempted suicide with the mental injury of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The injury was inflicted by his witnessing the gory, machete-wielding genocidal slaughter by extremists of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda over a four month period in 1994.

Although he could have intervened as head of the UN peace-keeping mission to seize a major shipment of machetes and other arms that became part of the genocide, permission never came from UN headquarters, an omission that is part of his pain. He was able to save 32,000 Rwandans by disobeying the orders for the peacekeepers to remain aloof. Eventually, he was blamed for the failure of the mission and only years later was completely exonerated.

His stress disorder when he returned to Canada manifested itself in twenty hour days and a compulsive schedule of giving talks on the genocide at every opportunity. He was discovered drunk in an Ottawa park. He stayed away from his family in

Waiting for First Light

By Leo Reilly CSB

Quebec City and it was his sister-in-law in Ottawa who kept an unofficial suicide watch to prevent him from doing harm to himself. The twenty hour days finally led to a collapse and it was only after a brief pause that he was allowed to resume service on condition that he follow a more normal schedule.

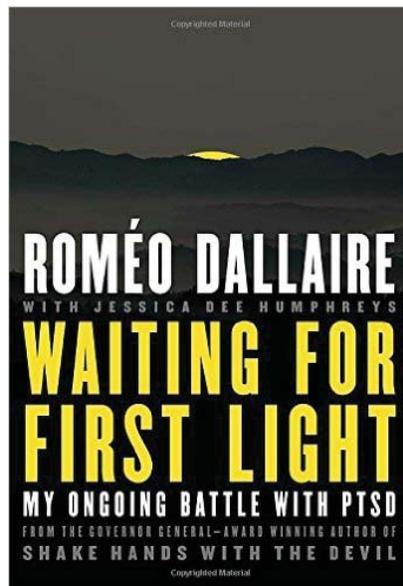
He was unable to keep from creeping back to working twenty hours a day. He had been promoted from major-general to lieutenant-general with special care for the wellbeing of his fellow soldiers. But when he was unable to shake the compulsions of his mental disorder, he was eventually asked to resign.

He continues the heroic struggle with talks, articles and books on a number of related fronts: the training of soldiers to serve and protect rather than kill, the duty of institutions to intervene, the importance of the International Criminal Court (ICC), where he testified against the extremists, the rehabilitation of child soldiers, who fight like soldiers and die like children, the need for Canada to match the United States



in dealing honestly with the mental injury of PTSD. He recommends a policy of relentlessly grinding away at bureaucratic incomprehension since our service to veterans in this regard continues to be minimal.

The title of the latest book, *Waiting for the First Light*, describes waiting for the ending of the endless mental pain that comes from the stench of the killing fields and the gaze of Rwandans astounded by the UN failure to stop the slaughter. It is a pain that drives this authentic Canadian hero to greater efforts supported by members of his own family to bring about a more peaceful world. As a devout Catholic, he knows that God exists because he met the Devil in Rwanda and that we must not cease from our efforts to overcome evil with good.



Dallaire, Romeo with Jessica Dee Humphreys. Waiting for First Light: My Ongoing Struggle with PTSD. Toronto: Random House, 2016.

Stirring: (adjective) exciting, arousing, awakening, animating, quickening

Sermon: Epiphany under Empire: Remembering Resistance

By Ched Myers

Our world, which, like that of the Magi and Holy Family of old, dwells uneasily under the shadow of Empire. Indeed, under Trump the U.S. will intensify its rehabilitation of the old Pax Romana policy of “permanent war.” Meantime, our First World senses are constantly flooded with market- and media-driven delusions, distractions and commodity fetishism.

But how are ancient, mythical Magi supposed to protect us from such epidemic dehumanization? Their story is the focus of Epiphany. While the theological theme of “the in-breaking of the Light” tends to dominate our contemporary liturgical celebrations, we should not overlook the Magi. But that’s not easy in imperial America, with its White House crèches and relentless commercial huckstering. We have long candy-coated and Disneyfied the Christmas story

beyond biblical recognition, and no characters have been more domesticated than the “Wise Men from the East.”

Matthew’s Nativity account narrates the archetypal conflict between a King (Herod) and a Kid (Jesus), to which the visit of the Magi is central. Herod, the powerful, half-Jewish despot serving Rome’s interests in colonial Palestine, oppressed his own people with taxes to fund his grandiose building projects. Herod instituted what today would be called a police-state, complete with loyalty oaths, surveillance, informers, secret police, imprisonment, torture and brutal retaliation against any serious dissenter.

Herod is double-crossed by Magi “from the east,” whom he had employed as agents to find the Jesus so he could ostensibly “bless” him. Herod cloaks his real intentions in pious pretense

. The Magi, however, are not fooled. Finding Jesus, they offer him gifts befitting true authority, thereby rendering *him* their allegiance, then turn heel and slip out of the country.

Their “civil disobedience” to imperial authority calls to mind a second story from the Hebrew Bible. Exodus 1-2 narrates the birth of Moses, whose life is also threatened by a paranoid potentate, and who is similarly saved by non-cooperating “double agents.” The challenge of an infant brings both Herod and Pharaoh to unleash policies of infanticide – justified by “national security.” But the best-laid royal plans fail because their “accomplices” (the Hebrew midwives, the *magoi*) instead deceive their superiors in order to *choose life*. We never hear again of these mysterious heroes in the biblical story – yet upon their “bit parts” of costly conscience hangs the entire drama. Dare we assume that our own choices in a time of imperial violence, minor players though we be, are of any less consequence?



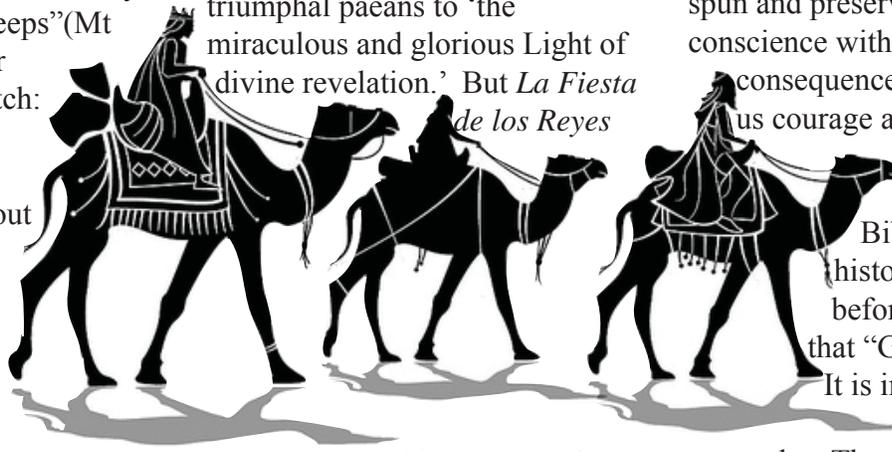
This iconic photo of nonviolent resistance to the violence of the state shows Leisha Evans confronting the police at a demonstration after the fatal shooting, on July 5, 2016, of Alton Sterling, a 37-year-old black man, who was shot several times at close range while held down on the ground by two white Baton Rouge Police Department officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Stirring: (noun) the act of moving or putting into motion, activity

In both the Moses and Jesus stories, the Empire strikes back, and the slaughter of innocents ensues – commemorated in the church’s usually-ignored Feast of the Holy Innocents. “Rachel weeps”(Mt 2:17f = Jer 31:14) over such an absurd mismatch: emperors vs. infants! The Bible is so much clearer than we are about the cynical realities of Statecraft! Yet as imperial minds plot genocide, God’s messengers enter the world at risk: floating down the Nile in a reed basket (Ex 2:3), spirited out of the country on back roads (Mt 2:14). So does the Savior of the world begin life as a political refugee. Against the crushing presence of Power

is pitted the liberating power of Presence.

Typically in our North American churches, Epiphany brings triumphal paeans to ‘the miraculous and glorious Light of divine revelation.’ But *La Fiesta de los Reyes*



Magos reminds us of ambiguity, violence, displacement and danger – which is to say, of real life as it is for the poor in the shadow of empire. For our world, too, teems with

refugees, wailing mothers, and murderous foreign policies.

Epiphany invites us to remember old stories of resistance that were spun and preserved by people of conscience with no certainty of the consequences. May they give us courage and hope in our own time of imperial discontent. The Bible has seen our historical moment before, and assures us that “God is with us.” It is into *this* darkness that the Light still sneaks. The question is whether we will recognize the Presence, and like the *magoi*, act accordingly.

Ched Myers is an American theologian specializing in biblical studies and political theology. The full sermon may be found on www.radicaldiscipleship.net.

Israeli army jails two conscientious objectors for fourth time

By Yael Marom

The Israeli army on Monday 9 January sent two conscientious objectors to jail for the fourth time, just five days after they had finished serving their third stint in prison. Presenting themselves at the Tel Hashomer military induction base, Tamar Ze’evi, 19, and Tamar Alon, 18, declared their refusal to join the army and take part in the occupation, for which they were sentenced to 30 days’ detention. By the end of this latest period in jail, they will have spent a total of 74 days behind bars for refusing to serve in the army.

Standing at the entrance to the induction center, the women said: “The choice to refuse army service is one of the stepping stones to turning life in this homeland into one of peace, freedom and fellowship. In our refusal to

take part in a system of oppression, we are in solidarity with everyone who is being denied the freedom of choice.”

The two Tamars were again sentenced, receiving a 30-day jail term for



their refusal to take part in the occupation.

Alon and Ze’evi both requested that they perform civilian national service instead of military service. In her original declaration of her refusal to serve, Ze’evi, a resident of Jerusalem, wrote: “Out of love for this land

and the human beings who live in it, I want to believe, and I do believe that there is a different path and that we can effect change.”

Alon, who lives in Tel Aviv, wrote in her declaration: “I can’t accept the claim that the oppression of another people, the denial of basic human rights, and racism and hatred are necessary for the existence of State of Israel.”

“Our fight is not an easy one, together and individually we encounter people who are unappreciative, who curse us and hate us personally, but this togetherness we have created always makes me feel that despite the difficulties, there is someone with me.”

Yael Marom is Just Vision’s public engagement manager in Israel and a co-editor of Local Call, where this article was originally published in Hebrew.

Stirring: (adjective) exciting, arousing, awakening, animating, quickening

The Real Argument Over ‘*Amoris*’ Is An Old One over Conscience

By Austen Ivereigh
(Excerpted from *Crux*
January 15, 2017)

The heart of the *Amoris Laetitia* disputes, which flared up again following the Maltese bishops’ guidelines on the admission of the divorced-and-remarried to the sacraments, is not doctrine or law but the role of conscience.

Both critics and partisans of the exhortation have correctly detected a clear shift in magisterial teaching in respect of how the Church responds to so-called ‘irregular’ situations, especially of the divorced and civilly remarried, away from St. John Paul II’s 1981 *Familiaris Consortio*. But the even more substantial departure, arguably, is from another of John Paul’s teaching documents, *Veritatis Splendor* in 1993, which argued against moral relativism, and the misuse of conscience to justify a subjective morality.

The four cardinals who signed the letter challenging Pope Francis over *Amoris* specifically cite *Veritatis*, asking if it still holds that, as they paraphrase it, “conscience can never be authorised to legitimate exceptions to absolute moral norms that prohibit intrinsically evil acts by virtue of their object.”

Grasping the nature of this shift that so concerns the *Amoris* critics is key to understanding this dispute.

It is not a doctrinal shift. The prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Gerhard Müller, has confirmed what is obvious from *Amoris* itself: there is no doctrinal difficulty with the exhortation, which reaffirms the constant teaching of the Church in respect of marriage indissolubility. Nor has the law changed. *Amoris* never questions either Canon 915, which demands

that Communion be withheld from those who “obstinately persevere in manifest grave sin,” nor the following canon, that people conscious of grave sin should not present themselves to receive Communion.

But while *Amoris* is very clear about not wanting to create new norms or laws, it is also very clear about fostering a new attitude. What *Amoris* seeks is a new attitude on the part of



the Church towards those who are in irregular situations, one that moves from a primary focus on defending the law and the institution from contamination, towards a focus on the need for accompaniment and healing of the victims of divorce, especially those seeking integration into the Church.

Just like the woman caught in adultery, the sinner is still a sinner; but Jesus sees her also as a victim in need of help and healing. This is a very different logic from that of the doctors of the law whose primary focus leads, necessarily, to shunning (and stoning) her “pour encourager les autres.”

Familiaris, written in an era when divorce was legal but not yet general among Catholics in many countries, reflects this logic. Catholic divorced

and civilly remarried people are described as having “broken the sign of the Covenant and of Fidelity to Christ” and of causing damage to the institution of the family.

Because the sacraments of Eucharist and Matrimony are signs of Christ’s covenant with the Church, those whose life situation objectively contradicts the Covenant place themselves outside the sacraments until they repent by returning to the first union.

Or, if they cannot do that because a greater harm would follow (say, to children of a new union) the price of their return is to live as brother and sister, as long as the church community would not be confused or scandalized.

Amoris, fruit of a synod which spent a lot of time examining the world as it is now, takes a different approach. Divorce is no longer a wolf prowling ‘out there,’ from which the flock must be defended; it is within the fold, devastating the flock. Furthermore, the Church has failed to keep the wolf out: Catholics have been woefully unprepared for the collapse in the wider culture of the understanding of marriage.

Amoris looks at a wounded flock, and looks for ways of bandaging wounds and restoring the sheep to health. It recognizes that even when people have fallen short, grace remains operative; and that not all real-world situations of divorce and remarriage are straightforwardly cases of adultery.

The theology of *Familiaris* takes place at the level of the sacramental and objective, while *Amoris*, reflecting the synod, is essentially pastoral and personal. There is no contradiction per se between the two: marriage is both an ontological reality and a vocation, a call to conversion. But there is a clear development, one that has implications.

Amoris refers many times, like *Familiaris*, to marriage as a sign of

Christ's covenant with the Church, but says it is an "imperfect analogy" because two sinful human beings cannot perfectly reproduce Christ's covenant. A married couple are (hopefully) on a journey – with the help of Grace – towards a perfect emulation of the covenant, but sign and reality are not yet one.

The danger of not grasping that the Christ-Church covenant is an "imperfect analogy" is that it leads logically to a rigorist position. Those who have placed themselves outside marriage are outside the covenant of Christ's love – they are not in Communion, and are therefore barred from the Eucharist.

But if the analogy is imperfect, that simple division between those inside and those outside no longer holds. Those who have broken the covenant of marriage are not outside Christ's love, which extends to all those who have failed to attain it.

Amoris takes that part of core Catholic doctrine (God's mercy includes sinners) seriously, incorporating it into the Church's praxis. So that where the logic of *Familiaris* is that the divorced and remarried are sinners who must repent of their ways in order to be re-admitted to the fold, the logic of *Amoris* is that the Church must reach out to them and look for ways of bringing them back into the fold through accompaniment and discernment.

But *Amoris* makes clear that this is not about simply applying the law to people. It must go beyond the law, into the realm of conscience. It calls on pastors to "form" consciences, not "replace" them. In other words, consciences must be respected as tribunals where law, doctrine and the real-life individual situation can be brought together and cross-examined.

This is the real shift – and the part that makes many nervous.

In *Familiaris* there is little role for

conscience, except as a means for attempting to understand and obey the law as it is universally applied. This is the approach that Cardinal Raymond Burke and canonist Dr. Edward Peters defend as immutable Catholic teaching.

Peters's objection to the Maltese bishops' guidelines (which he describes as a "disaster") is that they have caused individual conscience to trump the law, thereby repudiating canons 915 and 916. The Maltese bishops, says Peters, have assumed that "an individual Catholic's assessment of his or her own conscience is



the sole criterion that governs a minister's decision to give Holy Communion to a member of the faithful."

But that's not what *Amoris* teaches about the use of conscience. *Amoris* rescues a traditional Catholic understanding of conscience that was expressed at the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. Many saw John Paul's arguments against relativism in *Veritatis* as shrinking this understanding.

Like Vatican II and the Catholic tradition in general, *Amoris* portrays the conscience as the inner sanctuary and core of a person, where they are alone with God, facing His judgement. Conscience is not a way of evading responsibility, but assuming it. It is not

"whatever I decide is right" but rather, "the buck stops here."

Which is why, in the discernment process detailed in *Amoris*, the conscience must be formed and informed, and a final decision reached in conjunction with a pastor who knows the law and doctrine of the Church. It is a process that takes place not outside the law but beyond it.

In the key paragraph 10 that has caused such outrage among some, the bishops spell out a whole series of 'ifs' that all but guarantee (at least, humanly speaking) that God has spoken directly to a person in the depths of their soul.

If, at the end of the discernment, if it has been undertaken – as *Amoris* asks – with humility, discretion, and love for the Church and her teaching, if a divorced and civilly married person has sincerely searched, with an informed conscience, for God's will, and has a desire to respond more perfectly to it; and if, at the end of all that, they are "at peace with God," then they "cannot be precluded" from the sacraments of the Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

Peters talks of the minister's deciding to give (or not) the sacraments; he is policing the border. The Maltese bishops talk of the minister as being unable to withhold sacraments to someone who has reached peace through a decision reached in true conscience as result of an authentic discernment.

God goes beyond (not against) the law, and speaks directly to the human heart – and a minister of God, having accompanied and "ensured" the process, can only respect that.

Austen Ivereigh is a British writer, journalist and commentator, and co-founder of Catholic Voices, a communications project now in 20 countries.

Faith & Truth

By Cynthia Watson



Silence, based upon the 1966 novel by Shūsaku Endō, is the story about two 17th century Jesuit priests, Fathers Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield)

and Garrupe (Adam Driver), who travel from Portugal to Japan in order to locate their missing mentor, Father Cristóvão Ferreira (Liam Neeson), and spread Catholicism. According to Ferreira's letter, he has witnessed a campaign of extermination against Christians (at that time, Christianity was outlawed in Japan). They are also informed that Ferreira has renounced his faith (or "apostatized," a word that dominates the film throughout) and then disappeared. Much of the movie's action depicts the increasingly horrific persecutions visited upon the priests in an effort to break them of their faith. Although very long and dark, *Silence* is overall a sad and beautiful film. This movie challenges us to look at our faith and commitment to proclaim the Gospel.

Denial is a drama based on Deborah E. Lipstadt's book, *History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier*. David Irvin (Timothy Spall), a self-proclaimed scholar of Nazi Germany, files a libel lawsuit against Deborah E. Lipstadt (Rachel Weisz), an American professor in Holocaust Studies (Lipstadt claiming, "I am a woman, and I'm a Jew – he gets more bang for his buck"). The suit is filed in the England, where the burden of proof is on the accused. Therefore, it is up to Lipstadt and her legal team, led by Anthony Julius (Andrew Scott) as head solicitor and Richard Rampton (the great Tom Wilkinson) as head barrister, to prove that Irving knew he was lying in claiming the Holocaust did not occur. As Lipstadt says, "Not one photograph exists of the Jews in a gas chamber – so where's the proof?" When Lipstadt is asked by her legal team to fundraise to support the case, the Jews in America are forthcoming (including



Diretor Steven Spielberg), but the Jewish community in London asks her to settle out of court to avoid giving Irvin the chance to speak and give new life to his antics. Lipstadt sees this as appeasement. The most difficult thing she has to accept, however, is the decision of her legal team to keep her off the stand. Rampton explains they want to show that it's not her credibility in question, it's Irvin's. For someone who sees herself as a potential defender of her people, self-denial is a hard pill to swallow. There is a particularly profound scene when Lipstadt and her legal team tour Auschwitz–Birkenau, where Lipstadt recites *El Maleh Rachamim*, the Jewish prayer for the dead. Prejudice is not the only issue on trial here – truth, freedom of speech, and "false news", are all underscored. Lipstadt says, "We must continue to challenge people who call lies their 'opinions.' The media, academics – we must say, 'That's not true.'" In other words, all opinions are not created equal. Outstanding performances by all.

Hacksaw Ridge: Virginia native, Desmond T. Doss, enlists in the Army to fight in World War II. However,

because of his dream to become a doctor, and his beliefs as a conscientious objector, Doss intends to serve as a combat medic. He tells his veteran father



(Hugo Weaving), "While everyone else is taking life, I'll be saving it; that's gonna be my way to serve." Doss is placed under the command of Sergeant Howell (Vince Vaughn), and while he excels at training, Howell and his fellow soldiers mistake Doss' convictions for cowardice. They abuse him when he refuses to use, or even touch his rifle. To make matters worse, Doss refuses to train on Saturdays, as he is a Seventh-day Adventist. Doss' unit is eventually assigned to the 77th Infantry Division and sent to the Pacific theater to participate in the Battle of Okinawa (arguably one of the bloodiest battles of the war). While the battle scenes are extremely graphic and brutal, it's almost as though they are only incidental to the film – the real story is about Doss' desire to serve his country, yet because of his extraordinary faith, he can't bring himself to take a life. The real Desmond T. Doss said, "I felt like it was an honor to serve God and country. We were fightin' for our religious liberty and freedom."

Cynthia is a Basilian Lay Associate. She is Assistant to the Basilian Superior General and the Secretary General / Treasurer General.