Genesis 16:1-16 and
A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by John Justus Landsberg

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Everyone knows that we were all born in darkness, and once lived in darkness. But now that the Sun of Righteousness has risen for us, let us see that we no longer remain in darkness.

Christ came to enlighten those who lived in darkness, overshadowed by death, and to guide their feet into the way of peace. Do you ask what darkness? Whatever is present in our intellect, in our will, or in our memory that is not of God, or which has not its source in God; that is to say, whatever in us is not for God's sake, is a barrier between God and the soul – its darkness.

In himself Christ brought us light which would enable us to see our sins, and hate our darkness. His freely chosen poverty, where there was no place for him in the inn, is for us a light by which we can learn that the poor in spirit, to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs, are blessed.

The love with which Christ offered himself to instruct us, and to endure for us injuries, ostracism, persecution, lashes, and death upon a cross; the love finally which made him pray for those who crucified him – that love is for us a light by which we may learn to love our enemies.

The humility with which he emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave, and with which he scorned the glory of the world, and willed to be born, not in a palace but in a stable, and to die ignominiously on a gibbet – that humility is for us a light showing us what a detestable crime it is for clay, that is to say, for poor weak creatures, to be proud, to exalt themselves, or to refuse submission, when the infinite God was humbled, despised, and subject to human beings.

The meekness with which Christ endured hunger, thirst, cold, harsh words, lashes and wounds, when he was led like a sheep to the slaughter and like a lamb before his shearer opened not his mouth – this meekness is for us a light. By it we see how useless it is to be angry, how useless to threaten. By it we accept our suffering, and do not serve Christ merely by routine. By it we learn how much is required of us, and that when suffering comes our way we should bewail our sins in silent submission, since he endured affliction with such patience and long-suffering, not for his own sins, but for ours.

Reflect then, beloved, on all the virtues which Christ taught us by his example, which he recommends by his counsel, and which he enables us to imitate by the assistance of his grace.

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1Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – 1992 – pg 82
The Gospel of Life is at the heart of Jesus' message. Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as “good news” to the people of every age and culture.

Every individual, precisely by reason of the mystery of the Word of God who was made flesh, is entitled to the maternal care of the Church. Therefore every threat to human dignity and life must necessarily be felt in the Church's very heart; it cannot but affect her at the core of her faith in the Redemptive Incarnation of the Son of God, and engage her in her mission of proclaiming the Gospel of life in all the world and to every creature.

Today this proclamation is especially pressing because of the extraordinary increase and gravity of threats to the life of individuals and peoples, especially where life is weak and defenseless. In addition to the ancient scourges of poverty, hunger, endemic diseases, violence and war, new threats are emerging on an alarmingly vast scale. At the same time a new cultural climate is developing and taking hold, which gives crimes against life a new and – if possible – even more sinister character, which gives rise to further grave concern: broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of the rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the state, so that these things can be done with total freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the state, so that these things can be done with total freedom, and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems.

The end result of this is tragic: not only is the fact of the destruction of so many human lives still to be born or in their final stage extremely grave and disturbing, but no less grave and disturbing is the fact that conscience itself, darkened as it were by such widespread conditioning, is finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between good and evil which concerns the basic value of human life. It is not only that in generalized opinion these attacks ten no longer to be considered as “crimes”; paradoxically they assume the nature of “rights”, to the point that the state is called upon to give them legal recognition and to make them available through the free services of health-care personnel. Such attacks strike human life at the time of its greatest frailty, when it lacks any means of self-defense. Even more serious is the fact that, most often, those attacks are carried out in the very heart of and with the complicity of the family – the family which by its nature is called to be the “sanctuary of life”.

Beyond the general societal problems of today, we are confronted by an even larger reality, which can be described as a veritable culture of sin, a culture which denies solidarity and in many cases takes the form of a veritable “culture of death”. This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency. Looking at the situation from this point of view, it is possible to speak in a certain sense of a war of the powerful against the weak: a life which would require greater acceptance,
love and care is considered useless, or held to be an intolerable burden, and is therefore rejected in one way or another.

Precisely in an age when the inviolable rights of the person are solemnly proclaimed and the value of life is publically affirmed, the very right to life is being denied or trampled upon, especially at the more significant moments of existence: the moment of birth and the moment of death. This denial is still more distressing, indeed more scandalous, precisely because it is occurring in a society which makes the affirmation and protection of human rights its primary objective and its boast. How can these repeated affirmations of principle be reconciled with the continual increase and widespread justification of attacks on human life? These attacks go directly against respect for life and they represent a direct threat to the entire culture of human rights. It is a threat capable, in the end, of jeopardizing the very meaning of democratic coexistence.

At another level, the roots of the contradiction between the solemn affirmation of human rights and their tragic denial in practice lies in a notion of freedom which exalts the isolated individual in an absolute way, and gives no place to solidarity, to openness to others and service of them. Such a culture of death betrays a completely individualistic concept of freedom, which ends up by becoming the freedom of the strong against the weak who have no choice.

Faced with the progressive weakening in individual consciences and in society of the sense of the absolute and grave moral illicitness of the direct taking of all innocent human life, especially in its beginning and at its end, the Church's Magisterium has spoken out with increasing frequency in defense of the sacredness and inviolability of human life. Therefore by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors and in communion with the bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. As far as the right to life is concerned, every innocent human being is absolutely equal to all others. Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize.
Just as God has created us in his image and likeness, so also has he ordained for us a love in the image and likeness of the love due to his divinity. He says: You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind. This the greatest and the first commandment, and the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Theotimus, why do we love God? The reason for which we love God is God himself, says St. Bernard, as if to say that we love God because he is the most supreme and most infinite goodness. Why do we love ourselves in charity? Surely, it is because we re his image and likeness. Since all persons have this same dignity, we also love them as ourselves, that is, in their character is most holy and living images of the divinity. It is in this character, Theotimus, that we are related to God by such close alliance and such loving dependence that nothing prevents him from saying that he is our Father and from calling us his children. It is in this character that we are capable of being united to his divine essence by enjoyment of his supreme goodness and bliss. It is in this character that we receive his grace and our spirits are associated with his most holy Spirit, and as it were are made partakers of his divine nature, as St. Leo says. Hence, the same charity that produces acts of love of God produces at the same time those of love of neighbor. Just as Jacob saw that one and the same ladder touched heaven and earth and equally served the angels both to descend and to ascend, so also we know that one and the same love reaches out to cherish both God and neighbor. Thus it raises us up to unite our spirit with God and it brings us back again to loving association with our neighbors. However, this is always on condition that we love our neighbors in as much as they are God=s image and likeness, created to communicate with the divine goodness, to participate in his grace, and to enjoy his glory.

Theotimus, to love our neighbor in charity is to love God in the human being or the human being in God. It is to cherish God alone for love of himself and creatures for love of him. When we see our neighbor created in the likeness and image of God, should we not say to one another, Stop, do you see this created being, do you see how it resembles the Creator? Should we not cast ourselves upon him, caress him, and weep over him with love? Should we not give him a thousand, thousand blessings? Why so? O Theotimus,
it is for love of God who made us in his own image and likeness and therefore capable of sharing in his goodness in grace and glory.
Conversion of St Paul - WEDNESDAY

Galatians 1:11-24 and
A Reading about St Paul and the Unity of Christians, from a discourse of Paul VI.4

The two feelings that are dominant at this moment are a feeling of sadness, and a feeling of hope. Sadness, because unity among all Christ’s followers has not yet been restored. This brings to our mind an obvious and painful memory, the memory of history. Christ founded one Church. St Paul has left us in heritage, as it were, his commitment; Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all (Eph 4:3-6). How have we been able to become divided in such a serious, many-sided and enduring manner? And how can we fail to suffer at such a state of things, which in so many concrete ways still endures? In this, we Catholics certainly have our share of blame which also is many-sided and enduring. How can we fail to feel pain and remorse for this? Secondly: how can the difficulties standing in the way of reconciliation be overcome? Another reason for our reflection. We see the great obstacles, and they seem insuperable.

This is a grave state of affairs that even militates against the very work of Christ. The Second Vatican Council affirms clearly and firmly that division of Christians inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature (Unitatis Redintegratio, 1), and thus damages the work of reconciliation of all peoples.

Yet in these last few years marvelous strides have been made in different ways towards reconciliation. This is known and seen by everyone, and certainly we all rejoice at it. But so far no stride has reached the goal. The heart that loves is always hasty. If our haste is not heeded, love itself makes us suffer. We are conscious of the inadequacy of our efforts. We are aware of the laws of history, which call for a longer period of time than that of our human existence. And it is understandable that the slowness in reaching solutions should seem to make our desires, our attempts, our efforts and our prayer vain. Let us accept this economy of the divine plan, and let us resolve humbly to persevere.

Another sentiment that fills our heart with its lifegiving breath in regard to ecumenism, that ecumenism which really strives for the reestablishment of unity among all Christians. It is hope. Is it not prayer that nourishes hope? And does not St Paul assures us that hope is not deceptive (Rom 5:5)?

To bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth (Eph 1:10). This theme which has been proposed for the reflection for all Christians during this year's week of prayer concentrates our meditation upon the salvific plan of God for us and for the whole of creation.
Leviticus 26:3-13 and  
The beginnings of the Cistercian Order: a reading from the *Exordium Parvum.*  

We Cistercians, the first founders of this Church, in this document hereby relate to our successors how this Monastery and its way of life took its beginning according to the Laws of Holy Mother the Church; by what authority it began, and also by what persons and at what times; so that by the telling of the plain and unadulterated truth, they may be moved to a deep love for this Monastery and for the observance of the Holy Rule of St. Benedict which was begun in it by us through the Grace of God; and that they might pray for us who have borne the heat and the burden of the day without losing courage; that they might labor with great fervor in the straight and narrow way which the Rule describes, even unto complete union with God, when, having shed the garments of this flesh, they might happily rest in eternal peace.

In the year 1098, Robert of blessed memory, the first Abbot of the Church of Molesme founded in the Diocese of Langre, together with some of the brethren from the same Monastery, came to the venerable Hugh, who was at that time the Legate of the Holy See and the Archbishop of the Church of Lyons, stating that they desired to live their life under the guidance of the Holy Rule of Father Benedict, and that in order that they might follow out these designs with greater freedom and security, they earnestly entreated him that he would bless and endorse their project with his Apostolic Authority. The Legate was happily pleased with their desire, and he laid the foundation of their beginnings by his Letter.

After these affairs, the Abbot (Robert) and those who sided with him returned to Molesme and chose from that community of brethren those who wished to associate with themselves, brothers who had made their vows according to the Rule; so that between those who had spoken to the Legate at Lyons and those who had been chosen from the Monastery, there were twenty-one monks. Accompanied by such a troop, they made their way in all haste to the desert which was called Citeaux. This place was situated in the Diocese of Chalons-sur-Saone. Because of the thickness of the woods and undergrowth, it was very rarely visited by people and it was inhabited by nothing but wild animals. When they arrived there, the men of God immediately conceived a great and holy reverence for the place, for the more contemptible and inaccessible it was to the people of the world, the more they considered it fit for their life. This was the very reason for which they had come there. Far away and hidden by the density of trees and undergrowth, they began to construct a monastery there with the help of the Bishop of Chalons-sur-Saone and the consent of the one who owned the property. For these men, while they were still at Molesme, inspired by the grace of God, had frequently spoken among themselves about the transgressions of the Rule of Blessed Benedict, Father of Monks. They had lamented and grown sad in spirit,

\footnote{translation by a monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani.}
seeing that both they and the rest of the monks who had promised by their Solemn Profession that they would observe this Rule, kept that promise to a very small degree. On account of this, by the authority of the Holy See, they came to this solitude in order that they might fulfill their profession by the observance of the Holy Rule. Then Lord Odo, the Duke of Burgandy, having been delighted by their holy fervor, and having been approached by the letters of the Legate (Hugh) of the Holy Roman Church, completed with his own resources the wooden monastery which they had begun, and he daily provided for them in all their needs and assisted them abundantly with grants of land and cattle.
A Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for your stomach =s sake and for your other infirmities (1 Tim. 5:23). This is a remarkable verse, because it accidentally tells us so much. It is addressed to Timothy, St. Paul=s companion, the first Bishop of Ephesus. Of Timothy we know very little, except that he did minister to St. Paul, and hence we might have inferred that he was a man of very saintly character; but we know little or nothing of him, except that he had been from a child a careful reader of Scripture. This indeed, by itself, in that Apostolic age, would have led us to infer that he had risen to some great height in spiritual excellence; though it must be confessed that instances are frequent at this day, of persons knowing the Bible well, and yet being little stricter than others in their lives, for all their knowledge.

Timothy, however, had so read the Old Testament, and had so heard from St. Paul the New, that he was a true follower of the Apostle, as the Apostle was of Christ. St. Paul accordingly calls him A my own son A, or A my true son in the faith A. And elsewhere he says to the Philippians that he has A no man like-minded to Timothy, who would naturally A or truly A care for their state A. But still, after all, this is but a general account of him, and we seem to desire something more definite in the way of description, beyond merely knowing that he was a great saint, which conveys no clear impression to the mind. Now, in the text we have accidentally a glimpse given us of his mode of life. St. Paul does not expressly tell us that he was a man of mortified habits; but he reveals the fact indirectly by cautioning him against an excess of mortification. A Drink no longer water, A he says, A but use a little wine. A It should be observed that wine, in the southern countries, is the ordinary beverage; it is nothing strong or costly. Yet even from such as this, Timothy was in the habit of abstaining, and restricting himself to water; and, as the Apostle thought, imprudently, to the increase of his Afrequent infirmities. A

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There is something very striking in this accidental mention of the private ways of this Apostolic Bishop. We know indeed from history the doctrine and the life of the great saints, who lived some time after the Apostles’ age; but we are naturally anxious to know something more of the Apostles themselves and their associates. We say, ‘Oh that we could speak to St. Paul – that we could see him in his daily walk, and hear his oral and familiar teaching! – that we could ask him what he meant by this expression in his Epistles, or what he thought of this or the other doctrine.’ This is not given to us. God might give us greater light than He does; but it is His gracious will to give us the less. Yet perhaps much more has been given us in Scripture, as it has come to us, than we think, if our eyes were enlightened to discern it there. Such, for instance, is this text; it is a sudden revelation, a glimpse of the personal character of Apostolic Christians; it is a hint which we may follow out. For no one will deny that a very great deal of doctrine, and a very great deal of precept, goes with such a fact as this: namely, that this holy man, without impiously disparaging God’s creation, and thanklessly rejecting God’s gifts, yet, on the whole, lived a life of abstinence.

I cannot understand why such a life is not excellent in a Christian now, if it was the characteristic of Apostles and friends of Apostles then. I really do not see why the trials and persecutions, which surrounded them from Jews and Gentiles, their forlorn despised state, and their necessary discomforts, should not even have exempted them from voluntary sufferings in addition, unless such self-imposed hardships were pleasing to Christ. Such were the holy men of old. How far are we below them! Alas for our easy sensual life, our cowardice, our sloth! is this the way by which the kingdom of God is won?
In considering the teaching of St. Thomas, we should not understand it merely as the material substance of an explicitly formulated set of doctrines. Much too rarely does one remember that the substance of the content [of his writings] has its origin in a very special attitude of St. Thomas, human as well as intellectual, not only in the sense that this attitude colors the work with its particular emphasis, but also in the sense that without this special human attitude, what has been written might never have been written at all.

Should we therefore not consider this attitude, this temper of mind though Thomas himself never expressly formulated it as part and parcel of the spirit of the ratio of the Universal Doctor of Christendom the bold intrepidity which impelled and enabled the young mendicant friar at the University of Paris to recognize the truth of the Aristotelian world view, to re-integrate it as an essential part into the intellectual heritage of the Christian West, undaunted by the opposition of the defenders of traditional doctrine. And should we not see in the personal style of this bold recognition of truth and reality likewise an element of timeliness, in the sense of an exemplary attitude?

A Thomism which limits itself to the consideration of the material substance of what is explicitly said necessarily proves itself inadequate in a time which confronts humanity with wholly new problems and brings us into contact with realities previously barely glimpsed. In times such as these it is imperative to call to mind the qualities which make Thomas what he was: the all-inclusive, fearless strength of his affirmation, his generous acceptance of the whole of reality, the trustful magnanimity of his thought. And we find occasion, also, to remember: The formal and theoretical justification for this attitude is found precisely in Thomas=s doctrine of the infinitely many-sided truth of things. Truth

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cannot be exhausted by any (human) knowledge; it remains therefore always open to new formulation.

On the other hand, what we call here the Thomist attitude would have to include, in order to remain true to its master, the resolution not to relinquish a single particle of the heritage of truth; for it is the hallmark of the modernity of Albert and Thomas that both refused to disrupt and abandon, for the sake of new ideas, the realm of tradition; they relinquished neither the Bible nor Augustine (nor, consequently, Plato) for the sake of Aristotle. The new territory which awaits conquest today...is of virtually immeasurable scope.... Thomas Aquinas might attain to a new timeliness, both affirmative and corrective.