

# VITAL Theology

Helping People Think Theologically

## History, Doctrine Delineate Evils of Torture Debate Appears to Be Far from Over in United States

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There are specific theological and historical reasons why the U.S. should oppose without exception the inhumane treatment of prisoners, say theologians who have researched and written about torture.

But, as one theologian noted, a discussion about torture has been largely missing from the nation's pulpits during the current national debate.

The debate has been fueled by the argument put forth by Sen. John McCain in his successful initiative to ban inhumane treatment of prisoners in U.S. custody.

Using logic akin to the Golden Rule, McCain, who was a prisoner of war in Vietnam, argued that the U.S. should treat prisoners in the manner in which Americans would want their soldiers to be treated when captured.

Christians, however, need to consider a number of deeper theological reasons for opposing torture, said theologians interviewed by *Vital Theology*. These reasons include:

- ◆ the Roman Catholic Church's adoption of new doctrine that emphasizes the humanity of the individual and the church's reversal of longstanding acceptance of torture as a way to elicit truth;
- ◆ lessons learned from the Catholic Church's complicity with Central and South American military regimes that used terrorist torture during the 1970s and 1980s;
- ◆ the high value that the Christian tradition places on the human body;
- ◆ a reading of the Gospel of John that interprets the beating of Jesus during his trial before Pilate as judicial torture; and
- ◆ the call found in the Gospel of Matthew to visit those who are in prison.

President Bush, who had threatened to veto the McCain legislation, instead declared a public reconciliation with the Arizona

Republican, saying they had a common objective "to make it clear to the world that this government does not torture and that we adhere to the international convention of torture."

The convention referred to by the president is the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1987.

That document defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, [or] punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed ..."

But debate in the United States about torture appears to be far from over. A small number of citizens from other countries have claimed that they were victims of the Central Intelligence Agency's use of "extraordinary rendition," the practice of "disappearing" an enemy of the government and transporting him or her to another country to be tortured.

In addition, a "signing statement" released by the White House on Jan. 6 in conjunction with the defense bill has been interpreted by some to say that the president's lawyers believe that his powers allow him to ignore, during times of war, statutes passed by Congress.

Speaking at a conference on torture at Princeton Theological Seminary in mid-January, Ray McGovern, a 27-year veteran of the CIA, was asked if he gave any weight to the argument that torture tactics are necessary in the war on terrorism.

The *Trentonian* newspaper of Trenton, N.J., reported that McGovern responded without hesitation:

"No weight at all," he said. "Torture is terrorism." ◀

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## Where's Outrage? Glancy Asks

**T**he scene from the war in Iraq in May 2004 was horrific and unforgettable.

Four American civilian contractors were killed in a grenade attack by suspected insurgents.

Residents cheered and pulled their charred bodies from burning vehicles and hung them for public display from a bridge over the Euphrates River in Fallujah. Crowds gathered around the vehicles and dragged at least one of the bodies through the streets. Another body was pulled from a car and beaten with sticks.

After the incident, strong voices in the American media were asking why Muslim clerics had not condemned this act, recalled Jennifer Glancy, chair of the department of religious studies at Le Moyne College, in Syracuse, N.Y. Some U.S. commentators apparently were oblivious to the fact that many clerics had already spoken out against the atrocity.

But when revelations of questionable and secretive methods of extracting information from enemy combatants came to light in the United States, there was little response from Christian churches in America.

The leaders of several denominations issued statements of principle, noted Glancy, an Episcopal laywoman.

"But where is the preaching?" she asked. While others were wondering why Congress was not speaking up, Glancy wondered why churches had little to say about torture.

"This really is a violation of human personhood," she continued. "The body of Christian anthropology is connected to human identity, and we can't separate the body and human identity. (Torture) is an assault on human dignity that is inconsistent with the gospel."

Despite overwhelming support in Congress for Sen. John McCain's proposal to ban inhumane treatment of enemy soldiers, the Bush administration was slow to accept the legislation and did so only when it could no longer resist the political pressure.

Vice President Cheney was so vehement in arguing that the CIA should be exempt from restrictions on inhumane treatment that former CIA director Stansfield Turner labeled him "a vice president for torture."

But the Bush administration was hardly alone in its defense of torture.

As Glancy noted, the "ticking bomb" argument put forth to defend the use of torture was first articulated by Alan Dershowitz,

a liberal law professor from Harvard.

In a nutshell, that argument says that if a captured terrorist knows when and where a bomb will explode—potentially killing many people—an exception to legal conventions can be made and the terrorist should be tortured in an effort to produce the information and save lives.

Many torture opponents have said that is not how torture works. Rather, they say, it takes a considerable amount of time to gain a psychological advantage over prisoners.

Liberal discourse that argues for allowing torture only in certain instances can end up legitimating the widespread use of inhumane methods of interrogation, said Glancy.

Most Europeans strongly oppose the use of torture in any instance, and the fact that large numbers of Americans believe in the efficacy of torture has strained relationships between the U.S. and European allies.

Glancy has two specific ideas of why torture has so many defenders in the Land of the Free.



Jennifer Glancy

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# 3 Reasons Why Theologians Oppose Torture

## It 'Misses Mark,' Hurts Community, Assaults Dignity

In his new book, *Torture: Religious Ethics and National Security*, John Perry gives the following ethical and theological account of why torture cannot be tolerated:

The Greek word used in the New Testament for "sin," *hamartia*, is associated with military usage and means to "miss the mark" in the sense of failing to make a bull's eye. Morally it connotes failing in one's purpose, to fail to live according to an accepted standard or ideal. Electricity is responsible for making life today safe, productive, and enjoyable. When a torturer applies electricity to the genitals, ear lobe, tongue, or nipples of his or her victim, its use no longer shares in the humanized blessing of a great invention, but has become sinful; the torturer's use of it has missed its mark because of his motive, intent and use of electricity. Despite the ancient Catholic reflections on the theory of a just war based on the legitimacy of self-defence, no matter how justified it might be, war diminishes those involved, twists their moral perceptions and values, and leaves all involved spiritually less than they were before.

One response to what makes torture different is that it is different only in degree. An Afghan who survives after stepping on an antipersonnel land mine left in the ground near his home years before by occupying Russian soldiers is physically and perhaps psychologically handicapped for the rest of his or her life. An Afghan who is suspected of belonging to the Taliban and who might, or might not, know the whereabouts of the Taliban leader, Sheikh Mohammed Omar, is tortured at Bagram Airbase during interrogation and survives. He may carry not only physical injuries for the rest of his life, but also must live with the psychological and moral trauma of having been up close and personal with fellow human beings, possibly also Muslims and Afghans, who may have taken

sadistic delight in causing him pain and terror. They may have also tortured his relatives, spouse, or friends in front of him to break his will, to destroy his loyalty to Sheikh Omar and to dishonour him in front of his fellow Taliban comrades should he emerge alive from his ordeal (since it would be assumed that co-operation was the price of his survival).

Torture is also personally destructive to the torturers because they intend to diminish or even destroy the personhood of their victims. It is this subjective, interpersonally destructive aspect of torture that makes it different and morally worse than many other destructive aspects of war.

The second response of Catholic theology to the question of what makes torture different is that torture destroys community and degrades the image of God in the human personhood of both the torturer and his or her victims. It is even worse than suffering or causing death in combat. The theological doctrine supporting this second point of view is that of creation.

The Book of Genesis in the first account of creation says that we are created "in the image and likeness of God (*imago dei*)." Jewish and Christian theologians have speculated about what permits men and women to share in the *imago dei*. One answer is hierarchical.

We humans are vice-regents of God on earth and have dominion over all other life forms. The cruelty of torture is special because no animal or other creature than a man or woman would inflict it in the same way upon someone else. While a cat might seem to torture a mouse, this is fundamentally different from what humans do to each other, which is intentionally cruel. Another answer to what constitutes the *imago dei* in us has to do with the way we think and act. What makes humans "like" God is their rationality and freedom. The fundamental purpose of torture is to overwhelm the victim's will and to leave the victim under the

domination and control of someone else, to break him or her and to take freedom away.

As a result of the teaching of Vatican II that we humans are not fundamentally individuals, but rather persons, many Catholic theologians today prefer a third answer to what the "image of God" is in man/woman. Basing themselves on the doctrine of the Trinity, they would say the human rights and dignity attached to our personhood and to human talent of creating and sustaining various types of community-life are grounded in our similarity to the divine nature, the nature of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, persons distinct only in their mutual relationships to each other in the unique community we call the Trinity. Thus, a torturer inflicting torments and suffering on a victim not only defaces another brother or sister, but implicitly attacks the face of God in the other, and destroys human community.

Similar to systematic rape, finally recognized by the War Crimes Tribunals in the Hague and in Arusha, Tanzania, as a weapon of war in the Bosnian and Rwandan genocides, and just as egregious and replete with moral turpitude, state-sponsored torture drives a stake into the heart of human community through its violation of the human person. Any nation that tolerates the practice is diminished by it. With innocent lives at stake, and a war against terrorism going on, nations are greatly tempted to use torture as a weapon and a technique for questioning a suspect. This temptation must be resisted. ◀

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# Church Has Built Arguments for and against Torture

## Catholics Were Victims, Perpetrators in Central America

After centuries of justifying torture as a legitimate means for obtaining religious truth, in 1965 the Roman Catholic Church officially declared torture to be an intrinsically evil crime. But governments, individuals, and even some representatives of the church have found old habits hard to break during times of national emergency.

John Perry, a Jesuit priest and adjunct professor of ethics at St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba, has documented the history and practice of torture and the Catholic Church's involvement with it in *Torture: Religious Ethics and National Security*, which was published in November 2005.

The most notorious example, of course, is the Spanish Inquisition. In 1252, Pope Innocent IV allowed the infliction of torture by civil authorities upon heretics, and torture became a recognized procedure in the inquisitorial courts.

In his 17th-century treatise on torture, the Catholic cleric Antonio Diana wrote that if there was only weak evidence against a suspected heretic, it was justifiable to elevate the suspect and interrogate him while suspended. Children and the infirm could not be tortured, but Diana allowed that it was appropriate to show children the instruments of torture and terrorize them into talking.

**“You cannot take that position on the dignity of the human person and then find exceptions to it.”**

The Jesuit Juan de Lugo wrote that even if there were a risk that innocent people would be tortured, the risk could be undertaken without committing sin because the possibility of heresy was of even greater concern.

Although torture is often preceded by the adjective *barbaric*, that's putting



John Perry

the blame on the wrong people, according to Perry. In fact, judicial torture disappeared from western civilization during the reign of the barbarians. It was reinstated only when they discovered the law of ancient Rome, which had been preserved in libraries.

The Catholic Church also was impressed with the ancient Roman system and, with great hesitation, it also reinstated the use of torture. Only later did the Enlightenment thinkers, with whom the church was quite uncomfortable, persuade western civilization that torture was immoral.

But Catholic theology also played a significant role in undermining the moral argument in favor of torture, Perry noted. Tertullian, Augustine and Pope Nicholas I were among those

who made arguments against the use of judicial torture.

Perry writes that during the 16th and 17th centuries—at a time when the concept of human rights had not yet been articulated—Jesuit theologians Adam Tanner and Paul Laymann argued against false convictions based

on confessions gained through torture.

As Perry tells the story, there were relatively few objections to the church or government using torture to get at the truth—a notable exception being King Louis XVI's abolition of torture in 1789 in France—until after World War II.

### Church's Reversal

During Vatican II, when the church took a stand against torture, it did so in no uncertain terms.

For many Catholics, *Gaudium et Spes* is the most important document to come out of Vatican II. It declares that torture is intrinsically evil and cannot be redeemed for any reason.

Adopted in 1965, this doctrinal statement lifts up the dignity of the human person and is based upon the theology of the incarnation. It holds that when God decided to enter human history in the second person of the Trinity, this gave human nature an expressed dignity.

Perry finds no room for waffling on torture.

“You cannot take that position on the dignity of the human person and then find exceptions to it,” he said. “It's a deontological position. The outcome of (making exceptions) can be tragic.”

At the end of the last millennium, Perry noted, Pope John Paul II requested forgiveness for the Catholic Church for torture, referring to “the excessive prosecution of the truth” used to secure confessions from alleged heretics, witches and sorcerers.

### 20th-Century Torture

Much of Perry's contemporary research has focused on Argentina, as well as Chile and Brazil, each of which used interrogational terror extensively in the 1970s when military regimes came to power to oppose leftist insurgencies. Each of the countries is overwhelmingly Catholic. By and large, the

torturers, their supervisors and superiors, and the victims were Catholic.

Perry proposes a theological case for not condemning torturers. His argument is that every person is a redeemed and forgiven sinner who theoretically is capable of committing any and all moral evil and sin.

"The actual position at the moment of our moral superiority over torturers is an undeserved gift of divine grace," he writes.

**"There's a form of cooperation and evil going on because you have taught certain people in the School of the Americas and elsewhere how to do this."**

He points to the case of Alfredo Astiz, an Argentinean naval officer who is under house arrest and wanted by several countries. Astiz freely admits to participating in notorious acts of torture on numerous occasions, but maintains that it was done out of devotion to his country. Unlike many others, Astiz never took sadistic pleasure in his work and never plundered.

If there is a place in moral theology for the "erroneous conscience," then Astiz might well fit that profile, said Perry.

Perry also highlights the case of Father Cristián von Wernich, who is alleged to have sought information from torture victims by appealing to their need to "get right with God." The most troubling allegation against him is that he solicited bribes from the parents of seven young people who were being held by the regime. Trusting the priest, the parents produced the money in an effort to win their children's freedom, but all seven were executed.

## U.S. Taught Torture

In an interview with *Vital Theology*, Perry cited two reasons that the military regime in Argentina was inclined to use torture.

One is that the Argentinean military called on the skills and knowledge of former Nazis who had escaped to

Argentina after World War II.

The second, according to the Canadian priest, is that members of the Argentinean military were trained in the methods of torture at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Ga.

The CIA taught torture techniques to generations of military personnel from Central and South America. In return, the U.S. improved its techniques by observing torture in action in the southern hemisphere.

"In the deep background of the United States has been a lot of use of torture," said Perry. "You haven't been doing it, but you've been teaching it. You know who does it well and you know how they do it."

Perry believes there is evidence that torture is again being used in many locations. Discussion about the ethics of using torture have occurred recently in the United States, Great Britain, Israel, Mexico, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and other liberal and democratic countries.

## Secret Prisons

While the U.S. has mostly kept its hands clean, Perry told *Vital Theology* that he believes the government has orchestrated the torture of prisoners in secret prisons in Europe during the war on terror.

"There's a form of cooperation and evil going on because you have taught certain people in the School of the Americas and elsewhere how to do this," he said. "Your prize students are out in different countries doing it."

In the rendition process that has been reported by the *Washington Post* and other media, the CIA allegedly picks up leaders from terrorist organizations and whisks them off to one of several secret prisons located in Europe. There, interrogators use water boarding and other "torture lite" techniques that are banned in the U.S.

"The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Society don't know anything about them," Perry said. "They haven't interviewed them or found where they are. They were there one day in Pakistan in hiding and the next day they were gone."

He believes that global terrorism has tempted the leadership in America and other countries to bend or even break the rules that they agreed upon in the U.N. General Assembly 30 years ago. ◀

## Where Torture Exists

**How widespread is torture?**

**Human Rights Watch, an independent, non-governmental organization, says that torture continues to occur in these 16 nations: China, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Syria, Turkey, Uganda and Uzbekistan.**

## Pilate Seen Employing Torture Body Central to Person's Identity

**W**as Jesus of Nazareth a victim of torture?

Jennifer Glancy, chair of religious studies at Le Moyne College, reached that conclusion in her article, "Torture: Flesh, Truth, and the Fourth Gospel," published in 2005 by the journal *Biblical Interpretation*.

According to Glancy, the vast majority of commentators who have examined *John 19:1-3* say that this passage makes no sense. It occurs in the midst of Jesus' trial before Pilate after the Roman prosecutor has concluded that no laws have been broken.

But those who want to see Jesus killed ask Pilate to find some kind of evidence against him. So, in Glancy's interpretation, Pilate has Jesus beaten in an attempt to extract new information.

Such torture was commonly used against people who were not Roman citizens and who had lower status in society. That description fits Jesus.

Glancy believes this instance of judicial torture found in Scripture poses a question for contemporary Christians about the meaningfulness of the body.

"One of the responses of liberal Christians is to respond as if torture is bad but you're really only doing it to the body," she told *Vital Theology*.

Modern versions of Christian anthropology have sometimes seen the body and soul as separate things, she noted. But texts in the New Testament, including the Gospel of John, make it clear that the body is central to a person's identity.

The Christian belief in the centrality of the body has been responsible for some unfortunate interpretations, she said, such as the notion that a person afflicted with cancer is being punished.

Glancy is having none of that kind of reasoning, but she believes that the Apostle Paul's description of the physical body and the spiritual body

in 1 Corinthians 15 shows that the two are connected and that both are important. For Glancy, this means that Christians must care about what happens to bodies—their own and those of other people.

The torture found in John—judicial torture that is used ostensibly to get information from people—has come to public attention since 9/11.

Reporting by Dana Priest in the *Washington Post* and investigations by Human Rights Watch have convinced Glancy that the U.S. has used forms of judicial torture in recent years.

This kind of torture is a systematic way of assaulting people's dignity and an attempt to destroy their sense of self, she explained.

Judicial torture also destroys the torturer, she said, because it will ultimately dehumanize that person as well. ◀

## Respect for Human Person Underlies Prohibition Vatican II Labels Torture a Crime

**T**he Roman Catholic Church opposes torture in the document *Gaudium et Spes*, which is the pastoral constitution on the modern church in the world. It was adopted in 1965 during Vatican II. Section 27, titled "Respect for the Human Person," prohibits torture and many other crimes. The following translation of Section 27 is provided by the Web site of the Office of Social Justice of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis:

Coming to topics which are practical and of some urgency, the council lays stress on respect for the human person: everybody should look upon his or her neighbor (without any exception) as another self, bearing in mind especially their neighbor's life and the means needed for a dignified way of life, lest they follow the example of the rich man who ignored Lazarus, who was poor.

Today, there is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbor of every individual, without exception, and to take positive steps to help a neighbor whom we encounter, whether that neighbor be an elderly person abandoned by everyone, a foreign worker who suffers the injustice of

being despised, a refugee, an illegitimate child wrongly suffering for a sin of which the child is innocent, or a starving human being who awakens our conscience by calling to mind the words of Christ: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers or sisters, you did it to me" (*Matthew 25:40*).

The varieties of crime are numerous: all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where people are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of the creator. ◀

# In Brazil, Church Won Torture Confessions

Research by a University of San Diego historian into secret negotiations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Brazilian military regime won him not only a literary prize, but 15 minutes of fame in the world's largest Catholic country.

Having gained access to the papers of a deceased general who kept minutes of the meetings, Kenneth P. Serbin was the first to tell Brazilians about the admissions of torture that were recorded by a secret, Catholic Church-Brazilian government commission. His work led to an appearance on the Brazilian equivalent of *Meet the Press*.

Serbin's book that documents the commission meetings from 1970 to 1974 is *Secret Dialogues: Church-State Relations, Torture, and Social Justice in Authoritarian Brazil*. The Portuguese translation won the Book Prize from the Brazilian

Section of the Latin American Studies Association in 2003.

At first, the church mostly applauded the military regime that came to power in 1964 because it viewed the previous government as moving too close to communism. But when Catholics were caught up in the web of torture, the church changed its tune.

In one instance, a priest who was an assistant to Archbishop Hélder Câmara was assassinated by a

rightwing hit squad. Other priests were killed by police or rightwing forces. And when Câmara made a speech in Paris denouncing torture in Brazil, he was declared *persona non grata* by the military regime.

Priests and nuns in the countryside bore the brunt of the military regime's repression for protesting against the regime. Often, the church tried to defend small land holders, squatters, Indians and others who were being forced off their lands by large corporations with the support of the military.

Serbin believes the government formed the commission because it did not want to lose Vatican support after Pope Paul VI made a speech criticizing Brazil.

While the regime tried to use the commission to manipulate the church, the bishops turned the tables by prodding the military on questions of torture.

"What the military wouldn't admit in public," said Serbin, "it would discuss in private, which was the disappearance, the murder and the torture of individual Brazilian citizens."

Serbin disavows any expertise on the use of torture outside of Brazil, but he believes that wavering on the part of the U.S. government is dangerous.

"In the Brazilian case," he said, "torture became a cancer on the Brazilian military. One of the main reasons that the Brazilian military decided to gradually return power to civilians was that the torture teams gained too much power within the military. They were trying to push the military further to the right." ◀



Kenneth Serbin

## Outrage ...continued from page 2

The first is an emphasis on security above all other considerations.

"As Christians, we do have to care about our own bodies and our own well-being," said Glancy. "But I think that we should not prefer our own well-being, our physical integrity to the physical integrity of others.

"I think we have come to believe that our right to walk unmolested down a street with no fear allows us to unleash fear and terror and pain on other populations," she said.

The geographic isolation of the U.S. and segregation within the U.S. population make such thinking tolerable, she asserted.

A second factor is the high level of tolerance for sexual violence and the threat of sexual violence—especially in the nation's prisons.

The U.S. has the highest prison population rate in the world, with 686

out of every 100,000 people incarcerated. By comparison, the United Kingdom is highest among nations in the European Union with only 139 out of 100,000, a rate that is only one-fifth that of the U.S.

"Americans have come to regard sexual violence—for example, male-male rape—as being kind of a joke or something you expect, or that is part of the sentence," said Glancy.

When people see sexual violence being used in prisons in Iraq they know that the same kind of violence occurs in U.S. prisons.

"Our knowledge of it and therefore our complicity of it influences the degree to which there is not more outcry over what's happening abroad," she said.

The Le Moyne professor's ideas were shaped in part by a chance encounter with a church service for former prisoners and the families of

prisoners that was being held in a hotel lobby by an independent church.

"I just stood there," she said. "I have never been in a Roman Catholic or an Episcopal church where we talked about members of the congregation whose families are in prison."

It is important for Americans to think about the degree to which they have become inured to various kinds of violence—especially sexual violence in the nation's prisons—and the implications of that for a business-as-usual attitude toward torture abroad, said Glancy.

The fundamental call of the gospel is not only to feed the hungry, but to visit those who are in prison, she said. If churches were more actively involved with prisons, U.S. citizens would not have the same tolerance for torture that currently exists. ◀



William James

## Books: The Mysteries of Faith

William Closson James is professor of religion and culture and religion and literature in the theological college of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. His most recent book is *Sacred: Essays on Religion, Literature, and Canadian Culture*.

Because fiction, as someone has said, begins in the domain of the known and pushes into the unknown, these three Canadian novels, not surprisingly, explore the mysteries of faith.

Miriam Toews, in *A Complicated Kindness* (Faber & Faber, 2004), creates in Nomi an intelligent and perceptively observant teenaged Mennonite apostate who challenges the religious norms of her family and community. Nomi establishes herself as a supersleuth of fundamentalist hypocrisy and contradiction who is at the same time seeking out something durable for herself: "I dream of escaping into the real world." Toews leaves us puzzling about what Nomi escapes from or to.

The late Carol Shields's last novel, *Unless* (HarperCollins, 2002), generates and resolves its own mysteries. Why is a young woman

resolutely sitting on a Toronto street-corner wearing a sign with the word "Goodness"? Her mother begins the story: "It happens that I am going through a period of great unhappiness and loss just now..." The heartrending inexplicability of a child's departure from the bosom of her family challenges the basic trust her author-mother has established for herself amidst a comfortable life.

"A story to make you believe in God," claims the narrator's source for this novel about a boy in a boat with a tiger by the tail/tale. Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (Harcourt, 2001) chronicles an against-all-odds odyssey of survival at sea that begins in India and ends in North America. Martel deliberately tests our credulity, raising issues about belief along the way. If the object of one's faith is but a fiction, does that matter? If a story is good, so what if it isn't true? *Life of Pi* stands as a wonderful yarn that challenges fideistic truth-claims and proposes religious devotion as a way of life.

Read these three award-winning novels to challenge and deepen your sense of what it means to be religious. ◀

A way to access  
theological wisdom  
when it matters most