

Dear Loved Ones:

What better time than Easter to speak to you of being re-born? It is well for everyone to doubt, question, and probe - because faith accepted blindly by rote is untested faith, which is no faith at all. Not to use our own intellect and will in such an essential exploration is to repudiate those very attributes of our humanity which are in God's image. But the time eventually comes when each of us must make a personal choice. And the perennial question is: "What think ye of Christ, whose son is he?" And the popular advertising motto comes to mind: "You've tried all the rest - now get the best!" The parable of the prodigal son further testifies that everyone is entitled to a second chance. So, to any of you who, in your honest search for alternatives, may have "strayed," consider the welcome that the prodigal received. And, please be fair! You've always been open to the cases presented by every other strain of religious and even secular thought - so why not risk a review of the case for Christianity? Never think you have heard it all (or even heard a valid case) from the dear nuns - who meant well (and be charitable - to persist in blaming them is a cop-out similar to the theology that ascribes all evil to the devil) but overly tended to the pious legend and not a little pure hokum. Rather, consider all the ecognized "brains" - many of them outstandingly "free spirits" - who unashamedly testified to Christ! And consider how the ascendancy of western civilization precisely paralleled the ascendancy of Christianity in that area/epoch! So, this Easter, I plead with you to simply be fair! Stay open to the best of current Catholic thought, even as you stay open to every other modern influence! Treat yourself to some good Catholic writing: C.S. Lewis (curiously never a Catholic), Raymond Brown, Karl Rahner, and Bernard Haring, to name a few. And don't be afraid of them because many of them are labled "theologians," or worse. C.S. Lewis says it best: "The student is half afraid to meet one of the great philosophers face to face. He feels inadequate and thinks he will not understand him. But if he only knew, the great man, just because of his greatness, is more inteligible than his modern commentator. The simplest student will understand, if not all, yet a very great deal of what Plato said; but hardly anyone can understand some modern books on Platoism." (And, as to that which goes over your head, see Sirach 4:20-21 = "don't sweat it!") Now I'm not here necessarily advocating a return to the old masters, for they did indeed write for others in another time and another place, and things have changed - the story of salvation is an on-going history. Rather, I commend to you the modern masters, as mentioned above. And I can give you your own test: Do their articulations increase your charitable tendencies and latent concern for others?" If so, their efforts are most probably authentic. But, if they arouse feelings of complacency, self-satisfaction or arouse negative or selfish instincts or seemingly promote their own prestige **Beware!** Finally, let me remark with Chesterton that "Nobody has ever tried Christianity and found it wanting; rather they have found it difficult and left it untried." That is, nobody ever promised you a rose garden. You can expect crosses in this life (and whether one be Christian or otherwise!). There will be pain. But it is uniquely the Christian message - the whole point of the Resurrection - that one should celebrate life in ALL its dimensions - yes, even the dimension of pain - and most especially through that ultimate pain - **DEATH** - which ushers us into eternal glory! Resurrection will indeed follow our own ultimate crucifixion. We're all going to die. So, I invite you **NOW** to some day celebrate my life by - **CELEBRATING MY DEATH!** I opt for the New Orleans style, where the musicians play bluesful dirges enroute to the cemetery, and on leaving break-out into joyous jazz! That best reflects our faith in the Resurrection! So, never travel to cry at my funeral. Rather, where ever you are, celebrate at a pizza feast on me. If you happen to be in the city of my death, it's on me at Leonie's. This will assure me you too believe in the Resurrection. And, please remember me always at mass and in your prayers. Til Later..L & GB!

Dad ( and Mom in Spirit)

P.S. In the end, of course, YOU must follow YOUR own conscience! I here merely entreat you to be "fair" in "informing" it - to stay open to whatever makes you more "loving" - which is to say, more Christ-like! And, speaking of books, when queried as to how to obtain wisdom, St Thomas Aquinas said, "Read only one Book!" (The Bible says it all!) L&GB, Dad