This issue of *Landas* is dedicated to the work of one of its most illustrious contributors, Father Joseph J. Smith, SJ. Father Smith is Professor Emeritus of Loyola School of Theology Manila Philippines.

Originally from Gardenville, New York, he entered the Society of Jesus on the eve of the feast of Saint Ignatius in 1944. He was ordained on June 22, 1957 at Woodstock College in Maryland.

Father Smith earned a B.A. in 1950, a Licentiate in Philosophy in 1951, an M.A. in 1953, and a Licentiate in Theology in 1958, from Woodstock College, Maryland, U.S.A. In 1962, he graduated with a Doctorate in Sacred Theology from the *Institut Catholique* in Paris. His doctoral dissertation was on Emil Brunner’s and Jürgen Moltmann’s Theology of Revelation.

Father Smith began his teaching career at San Jose Seminary, Manila, in 1962. One of the founding faculty of Loyola School of Theology in 1965, he has taught there uninterruptedly until today, becoming an emeritus professor in 1997. While his special area of expertise is Fundamental Theology, his work in that field is backed by a broad and deep knowledge of the whole Catholic tradition, including the Fathers and medieval theologians. Within theology, his first love has always been biblical exegesis, and his work evinces the Catholic conviction that the reading of the Sacred Scriptures is the soul of theology. The articles collected here are in constant dialogue with German theology, Catholic and Protestant, exegetical and systematic. They bear the traces as well, however, of influence from the francophone *Ressourcement*.

Joseph Smith is above all a theologian who has devoted his life to training ministers of the Gospel of Christ. His academic writing, sophisticated and of a very high caliber, flows directly out of his work as the Professor of Fundamental Theology at Loyola School of Theology (and many would say the pre-eminent fundamental theologian working in Asia). Articulate, careful, lucid, and profoundly erudite, these pieces illustrate what it means for theology to place itself at the service of the Church. Father Smith has written selectively, on questions arising from the Church’s mission to transmit faithfully the Gospel entrusted to the saints, in the midst of rapidly changing circumstances. It is remarkable, then, that though the articles in this collection date back to 1964, and are largely inspired by current discussions, they retain a freshness and vitality—precisely because they respond to contemporary issues by drawing on the deep springs of the Catholic tradition.

The articles fall into four groups, with the first and second group arranged in chronological order by original date of publication.

The first group deals with the theology of revelation. In “The Word of God in the Word of the Church,” Father Smith addresses a “pressing problem” in theology and Church life — the nature and status of preaching.
Specifically, the question in view is the efficacy of preaching. As with sacraments, preaching involves on the one hand a human action, and on the other an effect of grace, the arousal, sustenance and nourishment of faith, not only for the unbeliever, but just as importantly in the ongoing spiritual life of the believer: “The repeated proclamation of the word places the hearer in vital contact with the living Lord”. Father Smith proposes an interpretation of preaching as both the word of the Church and the word of Christ, analogous to the sacraments, in which Christ acts through the mediation of a sign. Indeed, in the liturgy the preaching of the word is vitally joined to the sacramental sign. Yet, “unlike the sacraments, the efficacy of preaching can be blunted by the personal unfitness of the preacher.... How far the word of the preacher effectively communicates the Word of God depends on the preacher’s diligence, learning, assimilation of the Word of God in scripture, and holiness.” Thus, faith and responsibility join hands in the act of preaching. This article, which marries theological acumen to pastoral sensitivity, should be required reading for seminarians and those who teach them.

“Emil Brunner’s Theology of Revelation” argues that Brunner and other modern Protestant theologians have stimulated Catholic theologians to take more seriously the character of revelation as an event. At the same time, the explication of Brunner’s theology of revelation shows how Brunner’s thought leaves room for affirming the propositional expression of revelation, despite the impression given by his somewhat misleading terminology.

Father Smith deftly takes up the question of the possibility of natural knowledge of God in “Primal Revelation and the Natural Knowledge of God: Brunner and Catholic Theology.

"Employing a close reading of Brunner on the question, and drawing on a wide range of Catholic theologians, he argues that, even on Brunner’s own principles, the possibility, though not the actual occurrence, of a true knowledge of God from creation is the transcendental condition of a genuinely human knowledge of God in faith. The article is a fine and subtle exposition of the rationale of Catholic theology, demonstrating, by dialogue with Brunner, the defects of a “two-story” construction of the relation of natural knowledge of God and knowledge of God in Christ, while at the same time showing the inner coherence of a more nuanced and accurate account that is able to comprehend the reality of sin, grace, reason, and revelation, and to make sense of Saint Paul’s declaration that sinful man is culpable for not acknowledging the deity of God manifested in creation.

Finally, there is a lengthy and meticulous Commentary on the Dogmatic Constitution Dei verbum. Following an introduction that outlines the history of the text’s preparation, Father Smith comments on each of the articles of the constitution in some detail. He finds in the constitution as a whole a deepened understanding of revelation as primarily a vital interpersonal communion between God and man, as “the living word that the living God addresses to the living Church composed of living members.” This lively analysis of the text remains a sure guide for the student and a stimulating interpretation for the scholar.

As a fundamental theologian, Father Smith’s area of theological research includes the signs which accompany and confirm revelation. Chief among these, most controversial and complex, and lying at the heart of the Christian Gospel, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed, in
Father Smith’s view, the very content of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is bound up with the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Thus, the second set of essays in this volume is comprised of three articles dealing with the ground and nature of Easter faith.

“Resurrection Faith Today” begins with a survey of the discussion among German theologians in the latter half of the 1960's about the nature of the earliest disciples' belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. After briefly rehearsing the views of Bultmann, Marxsen, Pannenberg and Wilckens, and Schlette, Father Smith cites a statement from the German bishops in 1967 delimiting the scope of discussion among German Catholics. The bishops’ statement affirms that “the resurrection of Jesus as a real event belongs ... necessarily to the Christian faith.” However, this leaves open the question what kind of “real event” the resurrection was: “Did the real event of the resurrection imply that the body of Jesus left the tomb?” The bulk of the article investigates the evidence of some key New Testament texts, and offers historical interpretation of what probably stands behind them. Relying on both literary and historical analysis, Father Smith makes a strong, careful and sober case that faith in the bodily resurrection of Jesus as signified by the empty tomb is central to the New Testament witness; this witness is historically credible even when one concedes that there are legendary and apologetic elements in the Gospel accounts. He proceeds to respond to two theological objections: that Christ’s resurrection must not differ from that of those who are in Christ, whose bodies undeniably decay and are destroyed, and that the empty tomb is a time-conditioned pre-understanding of the first disciples that we must dispense with in order to translate the primitive community’s Easter faith into a credible modern mode of thought. He concludes by taking note of the momentous importance of the possibility and fact of Jesus’ bodily resurrection if we are to hold firm hope for the material, historical world we inhabit.

“The Resurrection and the Empty Tomb,” written some eighteen years later, carries further the discussion of the empty tomb and its significance. The article takes account of two groups of Catholic theologians. Some “propose that in his resurrection Jesus became a new creation clothed in a new heaven-made body, which has no continuity with the dead body placed in the tomb after the crucifixion.” The other group of theologians “concede that in the abstract an empty tomb is not the unconditional presupposition for the existence of a risen body” but that it is a sign given by God calling for and confirming faith. The issue between the two groups is not whether the early witnesses speak of an empty tomb, but whether this affirmation is the result of their anthropological presuppositions about what must be true if Jesus is risen, or the result of actually knowing the tomb to be empty. The article reviews the arguments on both sides and, having offered a master-class in conducting historical argumentation, concludes that there is no assured historical conclusion. On the theological level, however, Father Smith finds convincing reasons to affirm the reality of an empty tomb and its significatory value as pointing to the real bodily resurrection of Christ, an understanding that belongs crucially to “the context of the total mystery of Christ.” Following a lead from Rahner, Father Smith argues, as in the previous article, that this real bodily resurrection is vitally important as the beginning of the transfiguration of the material world. Bodily resurrection, however, implies an empty tomb. Furthermore, the New Testament proclaims the total victory of this one unique man over death. The empty tomb, Father Smith avers, bears witness to the total and united bodily-spiritual nature of that victory.

“The Resurrection Appearances and the Origin of the Easter Faith” examines another
aspect of the resurrection faith. “Fundamental theology studies the resurrection in order to show the credibility and validity of the Easter faith.” That raises the question “How did the first Christians attain the conviction that the crucified Jesus had risen?” Since by its very nature, the resurrection is the passage into eschatological existence with God, the resurrection itself is outside the realm of historically verifiable realities (This is different from the issue of the empty tomb, which, as a reality in the material-historical world, is a sign of the resurrection.). Thus, “the last historical fact available to [historians] is the Easter faith of the first disciples and the astonishing reversal of their behavior within a short period after the disaster of Good Friday.”

What produced the change? After a careful examination of the pre-Pauline tradition of I Cor. 15:1-7 and Pauline experiences as rendered in the Pauline letters and Acts, Father Smith concludes that what produced this change was the “appearance” of the risen One to the disciples. He then critically engages an important alternative interpretation of the genesis of Easter faith offered by E. Schillebeeckx. Schillebeeckx, while insisting on the accomplishment of the resurrection in Jesus Christ, not just in the disciples’ experience, nonetheless wishes to interpret the disciples’ experience as produced by grace effective in and through psychological experiences and realities of a more general and “normal” human type. These include discussion among themselves, experience of forgiveness for their betrayal and cowardice, and reconsideration of what they had experienced in Jesus’ pre-resurrection life. Father Smith critiques Schillebeeckx’ view and concludes that it does not fit the New Testament data. Instead, though the precise “how” of the appearances is not available to us, it seems to have the character of an encounter that befall the disciples. That this encounter occurred, however, is the source of both the knowledge of the resurrection and the radical change in the disciples lives. The circumstances of the birth of Easter faith and the radical change in the disciples give credibility to their witness to the resurrection and summons a faith that is not arbitrary, but has reasons to support it.

Perhaps the most important contribution of Father Smith to fundamental theology is one that is not included here, but calls for mention – his study on “Hansjürgen Verweyen and the Ground of Easter Faith.” Hansjürgen Verweyen, of the University of Freiburg, Breisgau, is prominent among a group of German Catholic theologians who contest the constitutive significance of the resurrection appearances for Easter faith. The first part of the study (Landas 8 [1994], 147-181) analyzes and responds to Verweyen’s systematic thesis that the earthly life of Jesus inclusive of his dying was the objective de iure ground of Easter faith. The second part (Landas 9 [1995], 72-100, 181-208) investigates and criticizes the biblical foundation of Verweyen’s thesis and draws a conclusion. To include this study would have required eliminating some of the breadth of what is included in this issue, which the editors were loathe to do. Nonetheless, it demands mention in any survey of Father Smith’s work, and the editors warmly encourage readers to consult this landmark two-part article.

Taken together, these articles on the resurrection make for a substantial and important treatise in fundamental theology – a legacy to students and teachers of the discipline.
In the world in which the theologian now finds himself or herself, and more particularly in the Asian world, the reality of a plurality of religions “as spiritual homes of hundreds of millions of believers” cannot be ignored. Father Smith takes up the question in a 1990 article reproduced here: “Christianity and World Religions: Paul Knitter’s Pluralistic Perspective.” Though, Father Smith notes, Christianity has always known the existence of a plurality of religions, the fact of the apparent failure of Christianity to take hold among two-thirds of the world’s population, despite two thousand years of missionary endeavor, poses a special existential challenge to Christians. Father Smith first sets out a typology of theological positions on the relation between the unique claims of Christ and the truth-claims of other religions. Following this, he specifically engages the pluralistic account Knitter had developed up to that point. He concludes that Knitter has failed in his own stated aim of giving Christians compelling reason to “revamp or even reject their traditional understanding of Jesus Christ as God’s final, definitive, normative voice.” In particular, the article offers strong exegetical responses to Knitter’s evolutionary framework for reading New Testament Christology, illustrating a conviction that runs throughout Father Smith’s work: that systematic theology must be built on solid biblical exegesis. He also responds to Knitter’s interpretation of Rahner’s Christology and to his employment of liberation theology’s “criterion of praxis” (The latter response involves some insightful and apt epistemological reflection from the liberation theologian, Clodovis Boff.). Though Knitter’s thought has developed further since 1990, this article still stands as a thoughtful response to the main lines of his view. It makes a strong case for the traditional affirmation of Christ’s status as the unique, universal and final revelation of God, while holding open the door to further insight into revelation that may come as a fruit of interreligious dialogue.

Finally, displaying his skill in another mode of operation for the fundamental theologian, Father Smith gives a fine example of theological interpretation of a magisterial document in “Liturgiam authenticam: The Authority of the Vulgate and the Neo-Vulgate.” The article came to birth as a response to a claim by The Catholic Biblical Association of America that Liturgiam authenticam, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 2001, “appears to misinterpret the authority of the Neo-Vulgate.” Since LA grounds its position on the Council of Trent, Father Smith offers an examination of the relevant conciliar decrees. He does the same with John Paul II’s Scripturarum thesaurus, to which LA also appeals. This article, the most recent in this collection, retains its value for liturgists and biblical scholars as an examination of the Neo-Vulgate’s role in those fields. For the fundamental theologian, it provides a model of scrupulous scholarship in interpreting magisterial pronouncements.

This collection from the work of a serious, disciplined scholar and dedicated teacher should provide theologians a wealth of material for reflection and students a heady tour of some of the “big ideas” in late twentieth century fundamental theology.
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