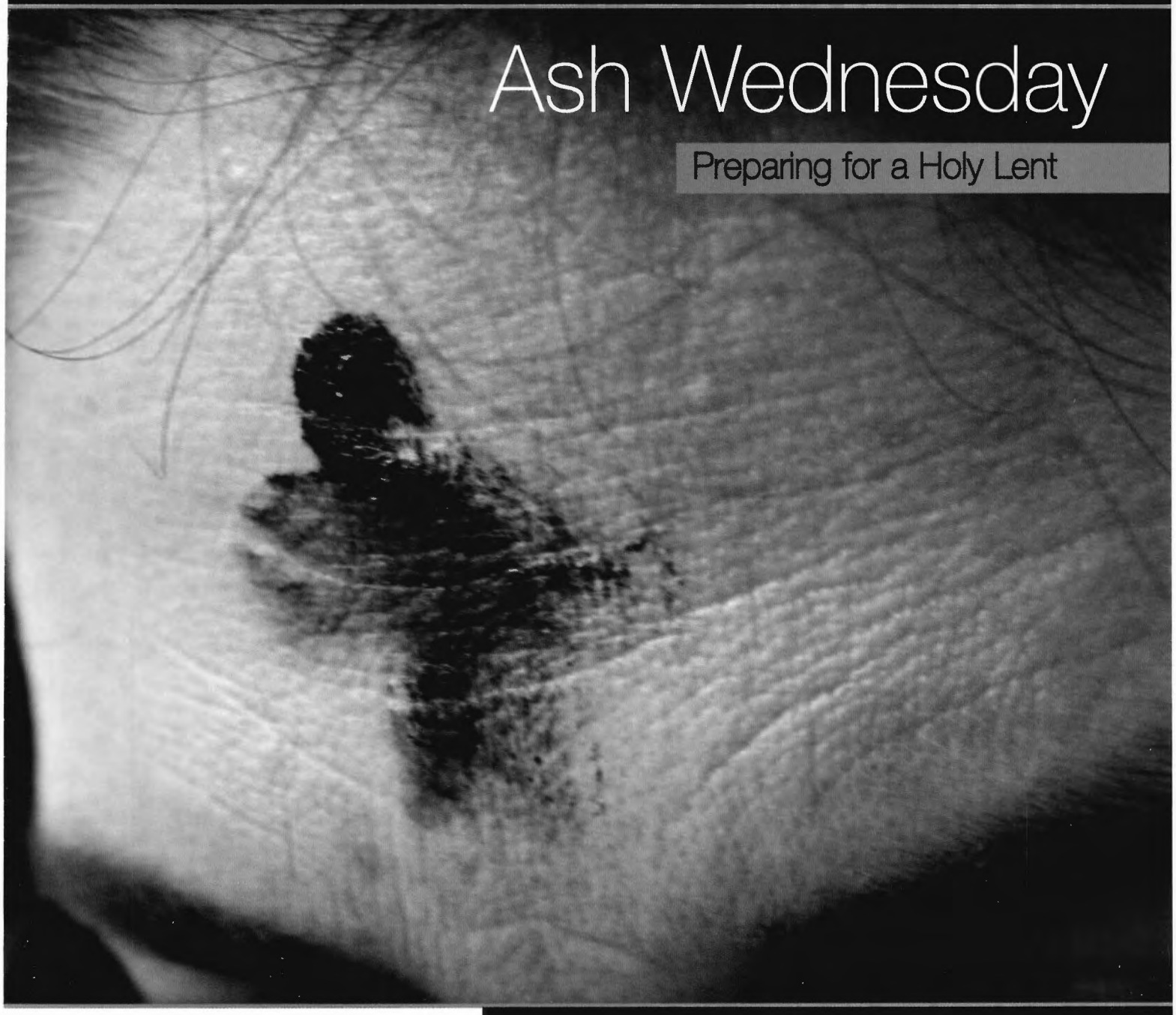
February 26, 2012

The Living Church

CATHOLIC EVANGELICAL ECUMENICAL



Ash Wednesday

Preparing for a Holy Lent

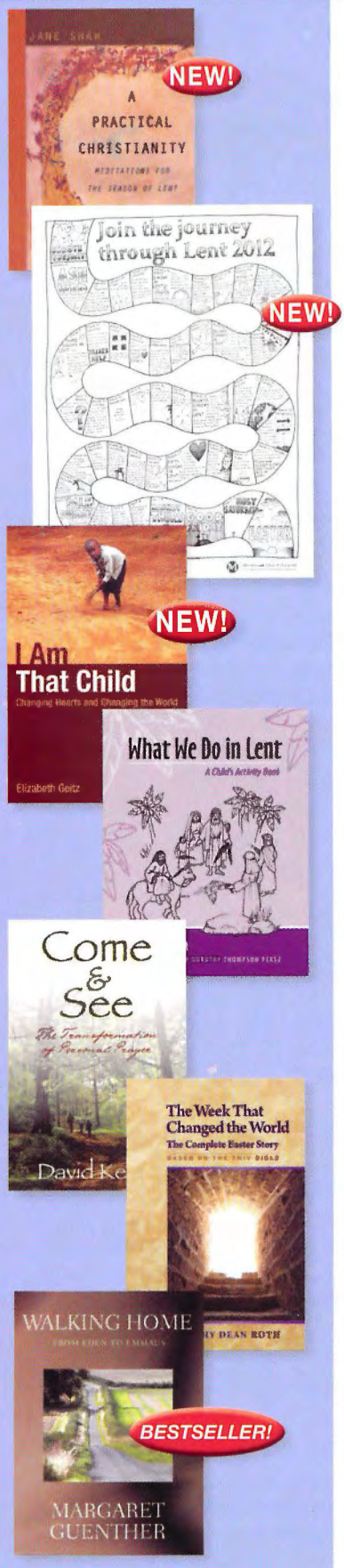
IN THIS ISSUE:

Paul Griffiths reviews Mark Noll

New books on Scripture

LENT BOOK ISSUE

Resources for Lent *from Church Publishing Inc.*



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Meditations for the Season of Lent

JANE SHAW

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From Eden to Emmaus

MARGARET GUENTHER

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A Living Church

Three adjectives appear beneath this magazine's nameplate: *Catholic*, *Evangelical*, and *Ecumenical*. In the often isolated and almost balkanized cultures of the West, we might suppose, or fear, that these words denote rarely intersecting worlds of discourse, noteworthy for their difference from one another: an attenuated Venn diagram, perhaps, at best. In fact, they describe the one hope sought and served by all the faithful, and in this way function more like synonyms, not least when arranged arithmetically rather than alphabetically: a universal gospel that would claim us together. Just so, we were pleased to place on our redesigned website a "vision" statement, setting forth our sense of call, as servants of the Word of Love. And we are honored to feature in this Lent book issue a review essay on the work of an evangelical Protestant historian who left Wheaton College to teach at the University of Notre Dame by a Roman Catholic (and former Anglican) theologian who teaches at the historically Methodist Duke Divinity School. "We proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

THE LIVING CHURCH

THIS ISSUE | February 26, 2012

The Living Church is published by the Living Church Foundation. Our historic mission in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion is to seek and serve the Catholic and evangelical faith of the one Church, to the end of visible Christian unity throughout the world.

Executive Council Cuts Draft Budget

Amid conflicting priorities of its two presiding officers, the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church has approved a draft budget of $104.9 million for 2013-15.

Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori had favored cutting the budget by 15 percent, while Bonnie Anderson, president of the House of Deputies, had favored cutting 19 percent. The draft approved by the council allotted $1.3 million more than it would have under a 15-percent reduction.

Mary Frances Schjonberg/ENS photo

Members of the Episcopal Church's Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance consult an online version of the 2013-15 draft budget during their meeting in Maryland.

In her closing remarks to the council, which met Jan. 27-29 in Linthicum Heights, Md., Anderson said the church will soon spend $8.7 million annually on maintaining the Episcopal Church Center.

"If we continue to spend this kind of money on a building to house an executive structure, the only place we'll be able to look for savings will be in areas that compromise the voices and leadership of clergy and laypeople in the church," Anderson said. "That's not faithful to our tradition as Episcopalians or to who I believe God is calling us to be."

Bishop Jefferts Schori urged the council to understand employees at the Episcopal Church Center as "a churchwide staff who are meant to be dispersed in service — sent across the church, spread out to help network Episcopalians in service to God's mission."

"We don't have a 'church center' except in Jesus," she said.

The church's Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance met immediately after Executive Council to work further on the budget, which will be voted on by General Convention in July.

Western Louisiana and Virginia Announce Nominees

Seven men — including a bishop, two canons to the ordinary and a cathedral dean — are nominees to become the fourth Bishop of Western Louisiana. Four of the nominees live in Louisiana and three serve in the diocese.

The nominees are:

• The Very Rev. Canon John B. Burwell, 60, rector, Church of the Holy Cross, Sullivan's Island, S.C.;

• The Rt. Rev. William O. Gregg, 61, Bishop of Eastern Oregon (1997-2000) and assisting bishop in the Diocese of North Carolina;

• The Very Rev. Jacob W. Owensby, 54, dean of St. Mark's Cathedral, Shreveport;

• The Rev. Canon Gregg L. Riley, 63, canon to the ordinary, Western Louisiana;

• The Rev. Frederick A. Robinson, 60, rector, Church of the Redeemer, Sarasota, Fla.;

• The Rev. Canon E. Mark Stevenson, 47, canon to the ordinary, Diocese of Louisiana;

• The Rev. Canon Larry G. Wilkes, 61, rector, Church of the Epiphany, New Iberia, La.

The diocese will elect its next bishop April 21.

* * *

The Diocese of Virginia has announced six nominees — four women and two men — in its search for a new bishop suffragan. Four of the nominees live in Virginia, and three are from within the diocese.

The nominees are:

• The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, 45, rector of Christ Church, Pelham, N.Y.;

• The Rev. Canon Susan Goff, 58, canon to the ordinary, Diocese of Virginia;

• The Very Rev. David May, 52, rector of Grace Church, Kilmarnock, Va.;

• The Very Rev. Hilary Smith, 43, rector of St. Paul's on-the-Hill, Winchester, Va.;

• The Very Rev. Shirley Smith Graham, 43, rector of St. Martin's, Williamsburg, Va.;

• The Rev. Canon Susan Sommer, 55, subdean and canon pastor of Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral, Diocese of West Missouri.

The diocese will accept nominees by petition until Feb. 13. The diocese's nominating committee, which was charged with preparing a slate of four to seven people, offers profiles of the nominees in a 29-page final report. Each nominee answers three questions:

• "How do you nurture your faith, prayerfulness and relationship with God?"

• "What is your vision for the Episcopal Church in the 21st century and how do you hope to participate in fulfilling it?"

• "Tell us about a time when your relationship with Jesus underwent a change."

The new bishop will succeed the Rt. Rev. David Colin Jones, bishop suffragan since 1995, who retired during the diocese's 217th annual council at the end of January. The election is scheduled for April 21.

Coming to an Aunt Betty Near You

Who says gay marriage is not big in Utah? At the Sundance Film Festival, one of the higher-profile documentaries proved to be *Love Free or Die*, a feature-length look at New Hampshire bishop Gene Robinson's struggles for full affirmation of openly gay clergy and newlywed couples by the worldwide Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church.

This was not Robinson's first time at this dance; a previous Christianity-and-gays doc, *For the Bible Tells Me So*, premiered at Sundance five years ago, featuring Robinson in a supporting role. But this time his was the name above the title, as they say in filmdom. In the end, the movie wasn't left unpartnered at the altar: Although *Love Free or Die* did not receive the voters' top honor, the fest conferred a prestigious special jury prize at the closing evening ceremony.

The bishop was no longer parked in Park City by the time the film won that award. He heard about the award from director Macky Alston while *Love Free or Die* was unspooling in the less glitzy climes of Pasadena's biggest church basement. The screening at All Saints Church was the centerpiece of a weekend of events under the umbrella "20 Years of Blessing," tied to the anniversary of the

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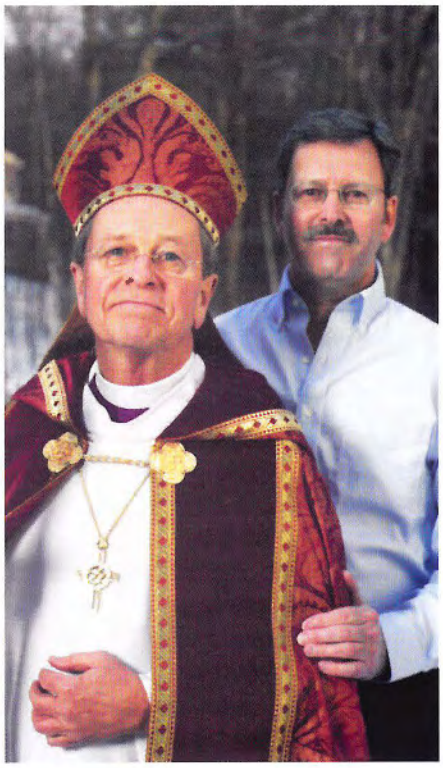


Gillian Laub photo

Bishop Gene Robinson and his partner, Mark Andrew, at home in New Hampshire.

(**EYEWITNESS** from previous page)

famously political parish's initiating of pastoral blessings for same-sex couples.

"Before we begin the Q&A, I want you to watch Sandra's face," Robinson said, as he announced the good-award news not just to the Pasadena audience but to producer Sandra Itkoff, who had joined him in leaving Sundance for the All Saints screening.

The stampede of applause for the plaudit put a cap on what, for this congregation and like-minded Episcopalians, will certainly count as the feel-good movie of the year. The film begins in defeat, as Robinson is locked out of the 2008 Lambeth Conference. For this audience there could be no Hollywood ending happier than the one that has American bishops approving twin resolutions on gay bishops and on liturgies for blessing by an overwhelming vote at the 2009 General Convention in Anaheim.

In the earliest stretch, it appears as if the documentary might take a *Roger & Me* tack, as Robinson makes rounds on the periphery of Lambeth but fails in most of his attempts to meet up with fellow bishops. "I was told that there is a picture of me in the security office so I could be recognized and turned away," he says. "It just seems a little over the top to me. ... I'm not going to storm the cathedral."

When he does finally visit Canterbury Cathedral, a guard declines — in the most polite way possible — his request to be filmed as he enters the building: "We don't want to be contentious. I'm not going to say no, but I'd prefer it if you didn't do it." Anglophiles and Anglicans may chuckle at that quintessentially British moment, even if general audiences do not.

Conservatives may be pleased to know that they are represented by more than hecklers and the dada theater of "God Hates Fags." While it's hardly a secret which side of the debate the filmmakers are on, Alston interviews bishops who oppose Robinson's agenda, some of whom are friendly toward him.

Bishop Edward Little of Indiana tells the cameras that "Gene Robinson's my friend and I want the very best for him. We have much more in common than what divides us. But my role as the bishop means I have to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the church. So it is impossible for me as a matter of conscience to lend my name or my Episcopal office to any act that would step away from that traditional Christian teaching on marriage."

Bishops on the liberal side of the debate are mostly seen taking an equally gentle tack. One exception is Barbara Harris, the first woman consecrated as an Anglican bishop, who's less prone than ever to mincing words. "At the last Lambeth," she tells the filmmakers, "I was just outraged by some of the things that were being said. I announced to all and sundry that if assholes could fly, this place would be an airport."

The Rt. Rev. Thomas Shaw, Bishop of Massachusetts, discloses — for the first time in so public a forum — that he is a gay man who, as a monk, honors his vow of celibacy.

"Everybody has a different role to play in this thing. I mean, I'm gay, and as a celibate monk, I can't be out in quite the way that Gene is out," Bishop Shaw says in the film.

"At the last Lambeth Conference they wouldn't let me bring a member of my community because it wasn't a female spouse. ... My community does that for me," he said of the support that a married priest receives from a spouse. "The Lambeth office said, *Well, how do we know they're not partners?* In the end all I could say was that we're both celibate monks."

Most of Alston's film is very much a celebration. One emotional

(Continued on page 30)

McLaren Book to Shape D.C. Diocese

Rectors need to take specific, intentional steps to help their churches grow, said the Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde in her first convention address as Bishop of Washington. Budde was a parish priest for 23 years at St. John's, Minneapolis, before becoming a bishop.

Speaking at Washington National Cathedral on Jan. 27, Budde said the diocese will emphasize congregational renewal and revitalization. The bishop said she intends to hire a new diocesan staff person responsible for congregational leadership and development.

She also announced a new diocesan initiative to begin in March called People of the Way, which will help congregations enhance their spiritual formation practices. This initiative will draw from Brian McLaren's *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices* (Thomas Nelson, 2010).

While "the Episcopal Church is a jewel on the spectrum of Christianity," today its "spiritual muscles" are "a bit out of shape," Budde said. "The undeniable reality is that our church is not thriving. ... I want to turn the trends of decline around."

She proposed strategies for rectors to encourage congregational growth. The strategies included:

• Address unresolved relationships within the congregation. The relational dimension of a church — not the facilities, parking or lighting — is what provides satisfaction among parishioners.

• Feed the "presenting hunger" for meaning and hope that church visitors often feel. At this early stage they should be warmly welcomed but not swarmed over or urged to join, pledge or run for leadership positions, such as vestry.

• Set a high bar for formal church membership, and make joining a rigorous and clear process.

• Promote small-group ministry, which helps parishioners feel a sense of community.

• Tend carefully to the 10 percent of parishioners who are visionaries and have new, creative ideas. If eight percent of the congregation adopts a new idea (early adopters) championed by the 10 percent, this 18 percent can move a congregation in a new direction. At St. John's, Budde said, "the freeing thing for me was that I didn't have to change everybody." She learned that "my job is to tend to the vision" of the minority, which need not come from the rector or the vestry.

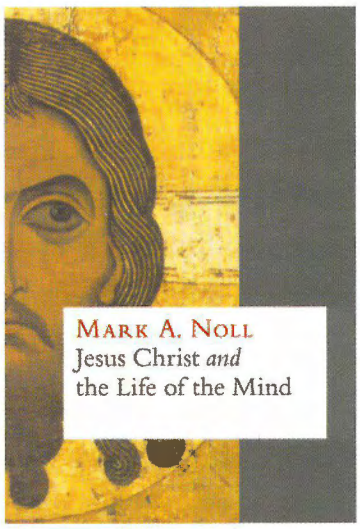
Peggy Eastman

REVIEW ESSAY

Remorselessly Christological

Review by Paul J. Griffiths

Mark Noll holds a chair in history at the University of Notre Dame, and is among the most eminent living historians of American Christianity. He is, Notre Dame notwithstanding, a broadly evangelical Protestant who has, in addition to his work as a historian, spent a good part of the last two decades diagnosing the intellectual weaknesses of the form of Christianity to which he belongs and suggesting remedies for them. His best-known work in this line is *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994), which showed, with conceptual subtlety and historical nuance, how and why American evangelicals have largely failed to foster the life of the mind.



Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind
By **Mark A. Noll**
Eerdmans. Pp. xii + 180. $25

That book was controversial so it is hardly surprising that there is by now a large literature on it of both critique and support. *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* belongs to the same field. In it, Noll offers an extended theological argument as to how and why Christians in general and evangelicals in particular should value the intellectual life, and how they might prosecute it. There is also, as an appendix, a short essay ("How Fares the 'Evangelical Mind'?") which updates and in small ways modifies the theses of that earlier book. What we have here, then, is the mature thought (Noll was born in 1946) of a leading evangelical intellectual on the questions noted.

By "the life of the mind" Noll means, roughly speaking, the kinds of intellectual work done in university departments which, in America at least, are likely to be classified as sponsoring work in social studies, the humanities, and the natural sciences. He is not concerned with — or at least he does not discuss — the kinds of intellectual work required to become a medical practitioner, a lawyer, or an auto mechanic. Within that limitation, Noll is interested in what there is about Christian understandings of God, the world, and the human that might motivate Christians to seek learning, and that might provide them guidance in how to pursue and use it.

In reading the book, it is important to keep Noll's particular polemical

(Continued on next page)

The Face of Christ
Anonymous – After Hans Sebald Beham (1500–1550)
After Dürer (1471–1528)
Woodcut on paper
Edmond de Rothschild Collection, Department of Prints and Drawings, Louvre, Paris

(Continued from previous page)

context in mind. He is writing for Christians who doubt that there are any good Christian reasons for seeking the life of the mind, and even for believers who think there are good Christian reasons to avoid that life. There certainly are now, in the United States, a good number of such Christians, most of them evangelical Protestants of one stripe or another, and Noll is of course aware of this. He is also aware that many, perhaps most, Christians do not have such views; they are, for example, largely alien to Catholic Christians, who mostly need no convincing that the life of the mind is important, even if they show no particular interest in pursuing it themselves.

The idea that in some sense Jesus saves not only us but the world by his substitutionary sacrificial suffering has, for Noll, implications for the practice of scholarship, especially in the humanities and social sciences.

Noll is aware of that, too, and he offers a diagnosis of why particular strands of Protestantism are anti-intellectual, locating the reasons in a rich brew of pietism and captivity to certain Enlightenment (and, therefore, pagan) tendencies to define Christianity and (for example) natural science as essentially adversarial to one another, so that if you adhere to or practice the former you cannot adhere to or practice the latter.

This diagnosis is no doubt accurate so far as it goes, and Noll's rendering of it is both more complex and more interesting than I've made it sound. But it underplays, in my judgment, the much more long-lived anti-intellectual — or at least anti-pagan-learning — thread in the fabric of the Christian tradition, evident already in Tertullian in the second century, in Jerome in the fourth, and, in some moods, even in Augustine at roughly the same time. Augustine, for example, writes in *De doctrina christiana* (On Christian Teaching) at the end of the fourth century that what Christians can learn from pagan books is either damaging or useful, and that if it's the former it's condemned in Scripture, while if it's the latter it's already found there.

This is a slogan that would cheer the heart of the most rabid contemporary Protestant critic of pagan learning, whether scientific or other; and it's right there in the work of Augustine, who is otherwise very receptive to and skilled in the deployment of just such learning, as Noll himself shows to good effect. So the historical picture is more complicated than Noll allows, and more-or-less principled Christian criticism of the life of the mind is more deeply rooted in Christianity than he would perhaps like to admit.

But these historical questions are not where Noll's interest lies in this book. Rather, in the first three chapters he offers a distinctively Christian, and remorselessly Christological, rationale for engagement in "serious learning," and in the fourth he thickens and nuances this rationale by focusing it on the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, from which implications are derived for the practices and goals of the intellectual life.

In Noll's view, the fundamental rationale for Christian learning is Jesus Christ. It is he who orders, sustains, and provides the *telos* of the created order in its entirety, and of all particular creatures. To study anything, therefore — any creature, or ensemble of creatures — is to study something intimate with Jesus; and to come to know something (anything) is to gain intimacy with Jesus. As Noll puts it, whenever and whatever we study, "we are dealing with the effulgence of Jesus Christ."

Anti-intellectualism in its Christian forms is therefore in fact, even though its proponents don't realize this, a form of opposition to intimacy with Jesus. And, the idea that in some sense Jesus saves not only us but the world by his substitutionary sacrificial suffering (much is packed into this formulation) has, for Noll, implications for the practice of scholarship, especially in the humanities and social sciences. For example, social science that understands human beings to be exhaustively explicable in terms of their social environments is necessarily wrong, or at least radically incomplete; and scholarship that proceeds upon such an assumption is thereby flawed. And, scholarship in the humanities that proceeds upon the assumption of humanity's perfectibility by effort or its moral self-sufficiency is likewise flawed.

Noll's strategy is to identify key elements of Christian understandings of the world and the human, and to use them as controls — negatively, to show where the life of the mind may go wrong; and positively, to show how it might be better lived. This is fair enough; all scholarship, at least in the human sciences, proceeds in some such way (there are Marxist and feminist and capitalist understandings of the world and the human element that provide controls on what counts as good scholarship in just this fash-

ion). But the principles he identifies are at such a stratospheric level of abstraction that they cannot, as they stand, provide much by way of guidance for actual intellectual work, which is (except in the rare cases when it is directly concerned with exactly such theoretical questions as those present in Noll's principles) practiced at a much lower level of generality.

Actual scholars in the fields that concern Noll study things like the stability of denominational affiliations over time, the rhetoric of Henry James's late novels, the significance of contemporary studies of brain physiology for an understanding of face-recognition, or how to judge the validity of scholastic Buddhist arguments about the principle of sufficient reason. Such enterprises as these get effectively no guidance, positive or negative, from Noll's principles; and so he must, as he does, offer lower-level guidelines for Christian scholarship in particular fields. This is what he does in the book's second half.

The strongest chapter here is the fifth, in which Noll offers a detailed and nuanced analysis of the kinds of historiography being produced by contemporary Christian and pagan scholars, and of the disputes that separate them, by appeal to Christology and the doctrine of providence. If all history is governed by divine providence, as Christians believe, then all historiography needs to be responsive to this in one way or another. But this does not yield a single historiographic model, in Noll's view. Christian historiography looks different (and should) when it takes as its topic specifically Christian history than it does if it treats pagan history; it also looks different if it is explicitly responsive to what is given by special (biblical) revelation than if it responds only to what is given in

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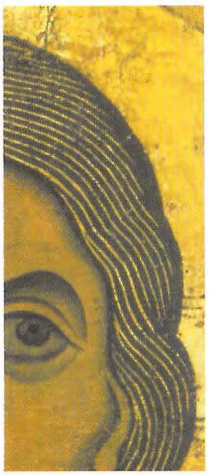
general revelation — which is to say what is available in principle to all humans.

This way of cutting the cake provides a useful template for analyzing kinds of Christian historiography, and for adjudicating disputes among them. If it's clear that a Christian historian is treating specifically Christian materials (let's say, the Council of Trent), but doing so self-consciously with reference only to what Noll calls the materials given by general revelation, then it will not be to the point to accuse her of insufficient analysis of the work of the Spirit at that council. Such analysis was not her task or goal, and her findings need not (and should not) contradict those of a historian concerned explicitly with analysis of the senses in which the deliberations of that Council were Spirit-guided. Noll's analysis, then, does provide guidelines that will help Christian historians assess their own enterprises — and, just as important, to see that there is no single model for good Christian historiography.



Noll's rationale for Christian scholarship, and his method of deriving principles for governing it, is relentlessly Christocentric, verging at times toward the Christomonist.

The sixth and seventh chapters, on scientific and biblical scholarship, are less successful. Noll does show in his discussion of scientific work that there is no contradiction or even tension between studying the way secondary causes in the world work and the abiding by the deliverances of Christian doctrine — indeed, that Christian doctrine commends just such study. But he provides no guidelines for Christians doing scientific work, other than to instruct them that they may. This is for a good reason: Christian laboratory work is not and should not be different from pagan laboratory work, for just the same reason that there is no Christian mathematics. And the upshot of the discussion of biblical scholarship is only that if Christians have a christologically nuanced understanding of the relations between divine and human agency in the production of the scriptural text, they need not worry as some of them do about applying the results of, for example, studies of parallels from Hittite or Babylonian texts to the study of the Old Testament. But, again, there are no guidelines for the particular practices by means of which such study might be prosecuted.

It is not exactly a criticism to say this. The reason for it is that many intellectual enterprises are simply unaffected by Christian faith: mathematics and close-to-the-ground empirical studies of most kinds are clear cases. Noll occasionally mentions this, but I wish that he had made more of it. Most Christian scholarship, if by that we mean scholarship done by Christians out of an understanding of their baptismal vocations, is not and should not be distinguishable from scholarship done by pagans. What motivates Christians to live the intellectual life is certainly different from what motivates pagans to do so, and most of Noll's fine book is devoted to delineating those distinctives; and some of the ancillary and preparatory practices that inform that life will also be distinctive; but what is done in that life, and, for the most part, the artifacts it produces — they are and should be effectively indistinguishable.

A final point about the book. Noll's rationale for Christian scholarship, and his method of deriving principles for governing it, is relentlessly Christocentric, verging at times toward the Christomonist. An untutored reader would scarcely know that the Lord Christians worship is triune, and that the Incarnation is therefore not the only thing to think about when thinking about how the world is related to the Lord and how it should be studied.

It is telling that, although Noll makes much use of the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds, the parts of them that deal with the Holy Spirit are almost entirely absent, and discussion of the work of the Spirit as relevant to a consideration of the intellectual life is completely absent. Some of Noll's particular recommendations, especially in the fourth chapter, on the significance of the atonement for living the intellectual life rightly, would require modification if thought about the Holy Spirit had been part of Noll's enterprise. But I suspect that the modifications would be in the direction of nuance rather than of wholesale revision. ■

Paul J. Griffiths is Warren Chair of Catholic Theology at Duke Divinity School.

Bedrock Evidence Resurrected

Review by Garwood P. Anderson

This is a massive project, and it will be for our generation numbered with N.T. Wright's *Resurrection of the Son of God* and perhaps a few others as the definitive arguments for the resurrection of Jesus. Meticulous to a fault (if that could really be a fault), methodical in the extreme, *The Resurrection of Jesus* is not beach reading — though neither is it in the least opaque. If there is a more thorough, a more detailed, a more methodologically self-conscious historical argument for the bodily resurrection of Jesus, I am not aware of it.

It is Michael Licona's conviction that biblical scholars are insufficiently equipped as it concerns historiography — too little trained in its canons, too little apprised of the contemporary discussion. This results in a haphazard appeal to data and a slovenliness of argument on the part of those whose disciplinary bona fides should have otherwise equipped them for this task. Thus purportedly historical investigations of the resurrection of Jesus devolve invariably into a predictable clash of worldviews, naturalists and supernaturalists arriving at preordained outcomes without common ground to engage what remains, in the end, a question about history.

A survey of the book's contents fails to do justice; its virtues lie less in its well-structured argument than in the painstaking care with which the author makes it — its "near-obsessive thoroughness," as Richard Hays puts it. In five long chapters, Licona (1) surveys recent discussions in historiography, favoring a version of critical realism with carefully articulated methodological controls; (2) insists against the objections of David Hume and all subsequent skeptics that "miracle" is a category susceptible to historical investigation; (3) identifies historical sources relevant to the resurrection of Jesus and assesses their relative value as historical testimony; (4) isolates by rigorous methodological standards that which counts as minimal historical "bedrock"; (5) assesses and finds wanting, in turn, the resurrection-denying hypotheses of Geza Vermes, Michael Goulder, John Dominic Crossan, and Pieter Craffert, concluding the book, not unexpectedly, by demonstrating that a "resurrection hypothesis" most satisfactorily accounts for the historical data.

With almost 640 pages of dense argumentation, populated by a staggering 2,000 footnotes (thank you, InterVarsity Press, for *foot*notes and not *end*notes), set upon a 55-page bibliographical foundation, in an argument not infrequently parsed to five levels of subordinated outline (e.g., 4.3.2.1.e.) — could there be anything that Licona misses? Well, not much. But I suspect I will not be alone in wishing for more engagement of at least two points of data: the empty tomb and the singularly attested resurrection appearance to "more than five hundred brethren" (1 Cor. 15:6). These mainstays in most arguments on behalf of the resurrection receive surprisingly little notice in Licona's treatment.

With respect to the empty tomb, the short shrift is explicable by means of Licona's method, which is to ask what could count as historical "bedrock," a datum which is at once beyond serious dispute and for which any serious historical hypothesis must account. Here Licona is admirably critical and circumspect, and only a few claims survive his rigorous sifting and winnowing. The contested empty tomb does not pass muster. Of course, this hardly means that Licona rejects the tradition of an empty tomb, only that he cannot appeal to it for the sake of his argument. This is a signal example of the sort of detached objectivity to which Licona aspires. Given the alternative accounts of the empty tomb which are on offer, his conclusion is not entirely surprising. What is surprising is how meekly Licona yields on this one. In fewer than two pages, he

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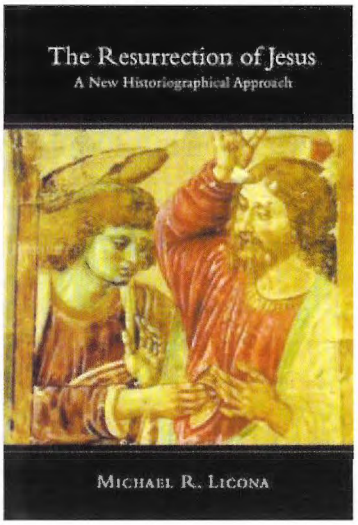

The Resurrection of Jesus
A New Historiographical Approach
By **Michael R. Licona**
InterVarsity. Pp. 718. $40

Bedrock: strong historical evidence and a nearly universal acceptance among contemporary scholarship.

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notes, rightly, that while the empty tomb enjoys support from a majority of scholars, it does not gather to itself a consensus. And, even more troublingly to him, those supporting the historicity of the datum are prone to hold to a bodily resurrection while those rejecting it are not.

Since "bedrock" is established by two criteria — strong historical evidence and a nearly universal acceptance among contemporary scholarship — this datum is a non-starter on the latter count, and appropriately enough Licona yields to his own criteria. Well, fair enough. But the superficiality of engagement with this question seems hardly in keeping with the rest of this rigorous chapter, to say nothing of the book. In any case, even if necessary for his particular argument, the setting aside of this question is a loss to the larger argument. More problematically, left unaddressed is the claim, popular in recent skeptical arguments, that the tradition of Jesus' burial is a patent fabrication, that the tomb could hardly be empty if there never was one.

It is easier to appreciate the spare treatment (one paragraph, though with numerous mentions) of the tantalizing alleged appearance to the five hundred. After all, Paul's matter-of-fact mention in 1 Corinthians is the sole reference to it among our sources. Yet again, for a datum of this significance, a claim rife with evidential appeal and exploited just so by St. Paul ("of whom the greater part remain to this day"), Licona's spartan treatment is at least surprising. Here, after all, is a brash claim embedded in Paul's 1 Corinthians 15 summary of the Christian message, the remainder of which Licona goes to great lengths to authenticate. One simply wishes for more engagement, even if in the end the probative value of the tradition cannot be substantiated.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the appearance to the five hundred and the empty tomb are "casualties" of Licona's method and the overall structure of his argument. The last thing Licona wants to do is to reprise an argument which inspires the choir to sing while leaving skeptics amused by its naiveté. He repeatedly invites critics onto a single playing field of methodological neutrality to adjudicate the same evidence where there is no home court advantage. This is evidentialist apologetics at its very best, which is also to say it is evidentialist apologetics at its worst. Invariably, some will mistake the limitations of what can be proved as a constraint on what can be believed. Or we might say that what aspires to be robust evangelism not infrequently makes for insipid theology.

Unfortunately, in the aftermath of publication, Licona — for all his methodological neutrality still a staunch defender of the Christian faith — paid a dear price for this book, being relieved of his position as research professor of New Testament at Southern Evangelical Seminary. It turns out that about *four* of his 640 pages of robust and painstaking argument for the bodily resurrection of Jesus are deemed problematic by persons of influence in his ecclesial context of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The offending passage is his treatment of Matthew 27:51-53, that perplexing account of earthquakes, rocks splitting, tombs opening, and the resurrection of "saints" set in motion by the crucifixion of Jesus. Drawing upon considerable evidence from ancient parallels (e.g., Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Philo, Plutarch, Josephus, Pliny, Lucian, Dio Cassius), Licona demonstrates that in otherwise more or less serious historical accounts, the deaths of notables and other political catastrophes are said to be accompanied by all manner of supernatural and peculiar happenings — indeed, many more curious and fantastic than those recorded in Matthew. Licona concludes from the evidence that the genre clues point away from a literal reporting of history to a kind of apocalyptic "special effects" (his expression), underscoring the epochal character of the death of Jesus. He rejects, however, any suggestion that the resurrection of Jesus should be viewed similarly to these "poetic devices."

Of course, for some this amounts to a denial of the inerrancy of Scripture, and this proved to be Licona's transgression. It seems more likely that it is a disagreement over the literary genre of the episode. The ironies are several: In the first place, not only is this a very minor part of Licona's book (0.6%), it is really not even part of *his* argument. Here he is refuting Crossan's claim that the Matthean episode amounts to a narrativized harrowing of hell. Indeed, were it not for Crossan's argument, it is not clear that Licona would have even addressed the passage at all. Moreover, for a book that invites all comers to assess historical data critically, it would have been exceedingly strange for Licona to plant his historicity flag on this episode.

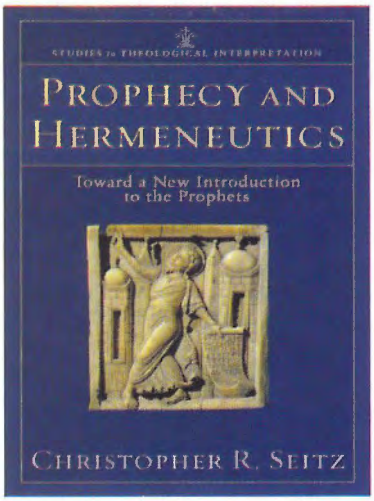
But perhaps the cruelest irony is that Licona himself subscribes to the evangelical doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible, even though he now suffers reproach for its sake. Whatever one makes of it, inerrancy is a construct which with the best of intentions promises to secure epistemological surety and thereby Christian commonality. But its definition and corollaries remain forever under negotiation, and its proponents far too often wield the doctrine toward regrettable ends, here discrediting a most able defender of the faith and, once again, dividing followers of the Risen Lord. ■

Garwood P. Anderson is associate dean for academic affairs and associate professor of New Testament and Greek at Nashotah House Theological Seminary.

Coherence of the Prophets

Review by Daniel Muth

It was said some years back that the laser was the quintessence of a solution in search of a problem. It's cool to make a light a beam that can do all that stuff, but what do we really need it for? Matters have changed in the last few decades and laser technology has found a useful niche in the technological pantheon. One wonders if something similar might not have been said about historical-critical methods of biblical scholarship more than two centuries ago. The various approaches have consistently yielded fruit of undeniable historical and scholarly validity, yet all too often of such spiritual sterility that the techniques have seemed more unavoidable than particularly enlightening.



Prophecy and Hermeneutics
Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets
By **Christopher R. Seitz**
Baker Academic. Pp. 272. $23

A relatively recent development that seeks to bring a sense of holism and coherence to modern biblical scholarship is the canonical method pioneered by the late Brevard Childs. This approach acknowledges the history of both the text and the community of God's people, who have, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, written, gathered, redacted, interpreted, and reinterpreted the Scriptures over time (sometimes by means of later Scriptures), producing the text of both testaments in their final form. The approach recognizes a fundamental theological unity of the Old and New Testaments, despite significant hermeneutical challenges, not least the development of the Jewish canon and its ambiguous state of fixity at the time of the rise of Christianity.

Perhaps the most notable intellectual heir of Childs working today is Christopher Seitz, an Episcopal priest, Old Testament scholar, and professor of biblical interpretation at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto. *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* falls clearly and purposely into two parts. In the first, Seitz surveys the traditional modern approaches to introducing the prophets, most of which concentrate on dating the various texts and fitting them into a reworked chronological order. Seitz refers to this approach as historical "overreach" that depends too much on the scholar's ability to reconstruct the past. He notes how the chronology has shifted over the years as scholarly opinion concerning circumstances and authorship has changed.

Though clearly unimpressed with the notion that Scripture requires "baking in a special oven before it can yield the product," Seitz does

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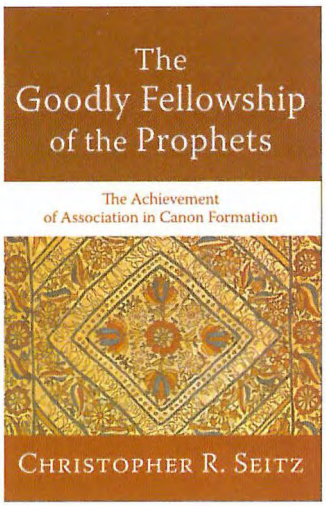
not dwell on the vicissitudes of historical reconstruction as the problematic aspect of this approach. His real issue is that the method vitiates any possible appreciation of the theological message conveyed via the canonical order of the prophetic books. This is the theme of the second half, which throughout counts Gerhard von Rad as its highly respected, much appreciated foil. While Seitz mentions the Major Prophets, particularly Isaiah, the exclusive focus of the second half is on the Minor Prophets (referred to as the Twelve).



The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets

The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation

By **Christopher R. Seitz**

Baker Academic. Pp. 136. $20

Most latter-day chronological approaches start with the raw denunciations of the Northern Kingdom by Amos (chronologically the earliest of the prophetic works) and end with Jonah's proclamation of God's offer of mercy to all, Gentile as well as Jew. Jonah, then, is the bookend to the purity of judgment showcased in Amos, his inclusive proclamation having, as it were, the last prophetic word.

Instead, Seitz takes the Minor Prophets in canonical order and treats them, per rabbinic tradition, as a single work. The message of Jonah (still valid and important) extends a theme of God's long-suffering nature that runs through the preceding Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah sequence and then finds a corrective two books later (after Micah declares Assyria God's instrument for Israel's punishment, and predicts its defeat) in Nahum, who makes clear that the judgment prophesied by Jonah to the Ninevites was postponed, not annulled. Numerous other themes connecting one book to another and developed through the order of the canon are likewise introduced.

The overall result, though not presented in full detail (as his subtitle states, Seitz is directing us toward an introduction to the Prophets, not limning one full grown), is probing, nuanced, and allusive. Five lessons are drawn from a canonical reading of the Twelve that may serve as an outline for a fuller work: (1) God's history is a providentially ordered whole; (2) the nations have a place in God's economy, different but parallel to that of Israel; (3) readers of the Twelve do not just hear prophetic words but are shown men of prayer; (4) the distinct message of the prophets must be set in tradition-historical relation to each other; and (5) God's character is just but patient, though not without limit.

In *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation*, Seitz begins by contrasting the three-fold structure of the Jewish Scriptures (Torah, Prophets, Writings) with a two-fold structure proposed by some (Torah and everything else), which collapses the Writings into the Prophets and fails to do justice to the careful structure and allusive associations among the books that make up the latter. The "association" referred to in the subtitle is the interaction between the books that comprise the Prophets (and within them, as in the case of the diverse traditions that make up Isaiah and the other Major Prophets) and between these and the Torah. Seitz takes note of the variations in the canonical order of the various ancient codices, finding that, with few exceptions (all predating Qumran), the Twelve were maintained as a tightly ordered unit, though their placement in relation to the Major Prophets varied.

The Twelve function as a single unit, much like the book of Isaiah, only with clearer divisions between the various authorial sections. The organization of the Torah is not discussed, presumably since it is clear and unproblematic; likewise the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel and Kings), which serve as commentary on the Mosaic books and associate with them via the prophetic figure of Moses in Deuteronomy.

Per Seitz, the Torah and Prophets were canonically fixed by the time of the New Testament and it is the third division, the Writings (and only certain of these) that move around in the various ancient lists of biblical books. Many of these are associated with the Torah and Prophets but not necessarily with each other. Given the nature of association within the first two parts of the three-fold structure, an understanding (as opposed to strict maintenance) of which Seitz defends as a necessity, the four-fold structure (Torah, historical books, Writings, Prophets) of the modern English language Bible

Its mindfulness of the community's role in developing the biblical witness would seem inseparable from the living Christian community that bears the biblical witness through time.

is unproblematic. Seitz is at pains to clarify that he is not advocating the reorganization of modern Bibles.

The canonical approach merits the attention of any Christian serious about Scripture. Its acceptance of the basic unity of both testaments and careful attention to the witness both of the voices speaking from the page and of the canonical structure that binds them one to another bespeaks a properly Catholic form of scholarship fully cognizant of the incarnational nature of divine revelation. Its mindfulness of the community's role in developing the biblical witness would seem inseparable from the living Christian community that bears the biblical witness through time. Seitz's further study, *The Character of Christian Scripture* (2011), has now appeared, tying together in important ways several themes discussed here, and deserves evaluation in its own right. Even so, there is much profitable reading in these two volumes. ■

Daniel Muth lives in St. Leonard, Md., and is secretary of the Living Church Foundation's board of directors.

Yoder's 'Straightforward Exegesis'

Review by Michael Cover

Christians familiar with the fields of biblical hermeneutics or theological ethics will need no introduction to the person and work of John Howard Yoder. Best known for his challenging and influential book *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (1972, 1994), this Ohio Mennonite theologian left a legacy whose influence far exceeds his denominational borders. After *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder went on to publish numerous other influential studies.[1] *To Hear the Word* numbers among a handful of Yoder's works which have been published posthumously.

To Hear the Word consists of 15 essays (plus an epilogue and appendix), which are divided into three subsections ("Exegetical Exercises," "Reading Carefully," and "From the Archives"), all related in one way or another to the reading of Scripture and Yoder's hermeneutic of "biblical realism." Although many of these essays have been published elsewhere, their organization and presentation here is clearly intended to make a sustained argument about how, and how not, to attend to the Word of God. The context of such a defense is Yoder's desire to return to the critiques of *The Politics of Jesus*. Yoder does not, however, offer line-by-line answers to his critics. These essays attempt a different kind of *apologia*. Instead of focusing on what his opponents said, Yoder emphasizes what — he claims — his opponents failed to do: pay close attention to Scripture.

Like Yoder's other works, *To Hear the Word* is replete with incisive and thought-provoking re-readings of Scripture. Through his exegeses,

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Yoder demonstratively argues again and again for the truth of the *dictum* of Puritan John Robinson: "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his holy word" (pp. 86, 90-92). In these examples of exegesis (Part 1) and the subsequent methodological section (Part 2), Yoder makes a strong case for the existence of a method of reading which is neither fundamentalism (or "scholasticism," as Yoder prefers to call it) nor liberal Protestantism, nor "sectarian" (e.g., merely Mennonite), but "ecumenical" and "radically catholic" (p. 73; see pp. 49-54).

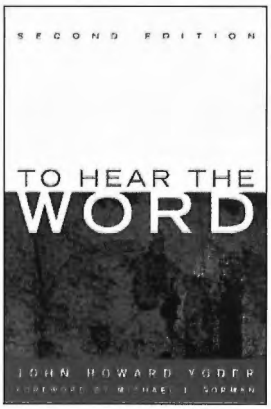
To choose but one example of such new "light": in noting the communal nature of the "new creation" in his first essay on 2 Corinthians 5:17, Yoder effectively challenges the missiological commonplace in Protestantism that conversion is primarily an act of the individual will. In making this point, Yoder touches on one of the most interesting and perennially challenging aspects of this section in St. Paul's epistle: the seeming fusion of a communal apocalyptic eschatology and an individual philosophical eschatology.[2]

Of course, despite the non-sectarian, "radically catholic" nature of Yoder's hermeneutic, his method and conclusions will not always sit comfortably with traditional catholics. One of the distinctive marks of Yoder's hermeneutic is his implicit dependence on the historical-critical method for determining his "straightforward exegesis" (p. 53). As Yoder describes the method he employed in *The Politics of Jesus*: "I took the texts as an ordinary reader would normally take them, doubting the appropriateness of any prior filtering such as would distinguish between narrative and prescription, between parenetic and normative, between individual and collective, between outward and spiritual meanings" (p. 56).

Several aspects of Yoder's description here raise questions. In the first place, by "ordinary reader" Yoder seems to mean a modern, common-sense reader. However, the discernment of such an "ordinary" reading, insofar as it considers historical context, etc., necessarily falls back on the epistemological foundations of historical-criticism. Thus, while fighting the Enlightenment rationalism of mainline Protestantism with one hand, Yoder lays it as the firm basis of his exegesis with the other. Of course, the historical-critical method has made and continues to make important contributions to the Church's reading of the plain sense of the Scripture. But on what grounds can figural readings of the Bible be excluded from the further "light and truth" which Yoder and Robinson so eloquently champion? Yoder's rejection of the distinction between outward and spiritual meanings actually goes against the grain of the biblical distinction between the literal and spiritual in 2 Corinthians 3 and the scriptural warrant for allegorical or typological exegesis laid explicitly in Galatians 4, implicitly in the Corinthian correspondence, and developed further by Origen and the Cappadocians in the East and Augustine and Thomas in the West.[3]

Second, like a good catholic reader, Yoder insists that there must be a "canon within the canon" (pp. 64, 81, 85 *et passim*; see *Dei Verbum* 18, which insists on the "pre-eminence" of the four Gospels). However, instead of applying the Rule of Faith to the entirety of Scripture, Yoder prioritizes certain biblical books, or parts of books, as authoritative, seemingly on the basis of their ethical content (p. 64). In his schema, the "narrative material regarding Jesus," the "historic reality of Jesus," or "the person of Jesus" stands at the center, surrounded by the "concrete pastoral guidance" of the epistles in the second ring (pp. 64, 81, 85). This, again, looks like an unwarranted concession to modernism, in the transformation of the Jesus of history, who is always a protean modern reconstruction, into the object of faith. Moreover, what happens to the high Christology of Philippians 2 and Colossians 1 in this scheme? What happens to Christ the high priest of the Epistle to the Hebrews or the Mariology of John's Apocalypse? Are these somehow secondary to "the narrative of the saving acts of God" because they are ontological/dogmatic rather than ethical (p. 85)?

The Old Testament, furthermore, while "equally indispensable" for Yoder, has been placed "one notch further out" in "the circle of assumptions and prerequisites, cultural backgrounds, and definitions of terms within which the primary testimonies have to be interpreted," in which ring stands also the writings of the Greco-Roman world (p. 81). In this oddly Dante-esque delimitation, the Old Testament seems to be consigned to a kind of limbo, and its ability to be heard as Christian Scripture becomes limited. Both modern canonical and pre-modern patristic commentators on Scripture would take issue with this. So, Gary Anderson, echoing the work of Christopher Seitz, argues in a recent essay on Mary that "the Old Testament is not simply *background*



To Hear the Word
Second Edition
By **John Howard Yoder**
Cascade. Pp. 266. $29.

to the gospel; it is part of the very fabric of the gospel whose full meaning can only be articulated by a conversation between the two."[4]

Such criticism is not intended to detract from the contribution of Yoder's work nor from the usefulness of this volume. Christians do well to heed Yoder's call to return again to the Word. Far from being sectarian, Yoder's model of reading Scripture with "a paradoxical hermeneutic of suspicion and trust"[5] sounds in accord with other important hermeneutical treatises. One thinks of Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*, which notes that "like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and *regulated* by Sacred Scripture,"[6] and of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, which, citing Article 6 of the 39 Articles, affirms that "the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments" are "the Word of God" and "contain all things necessary to salvation" (p. 526). Yoder, like both of these texts, presupposes the givenness of the Bible at the center of Christian community and the importance of reading the Bible *straightforwardly*.[7] Such attention to the literal sense of Scripture remains a critical first step in the Church's expression of Christian doctrine and in its ongoing discernment of communal ethical norms. ■

The Rev. Michael Cover is a doctoral candidate in theology at the University of Notre Dame and a priest in the Diocese of Dallas.

Notes

[1] For a complete bibliography of Yoder's works, see Mark T. Nation, *A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Writings of John Howard Yoder* (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1997). For Yoder's unpublished writings, see http://bit.ly/JHYoder.

[2] See D. Aune, "Anthropological Duality in the Eschatology of 2 Cor 4:16-5:10," in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

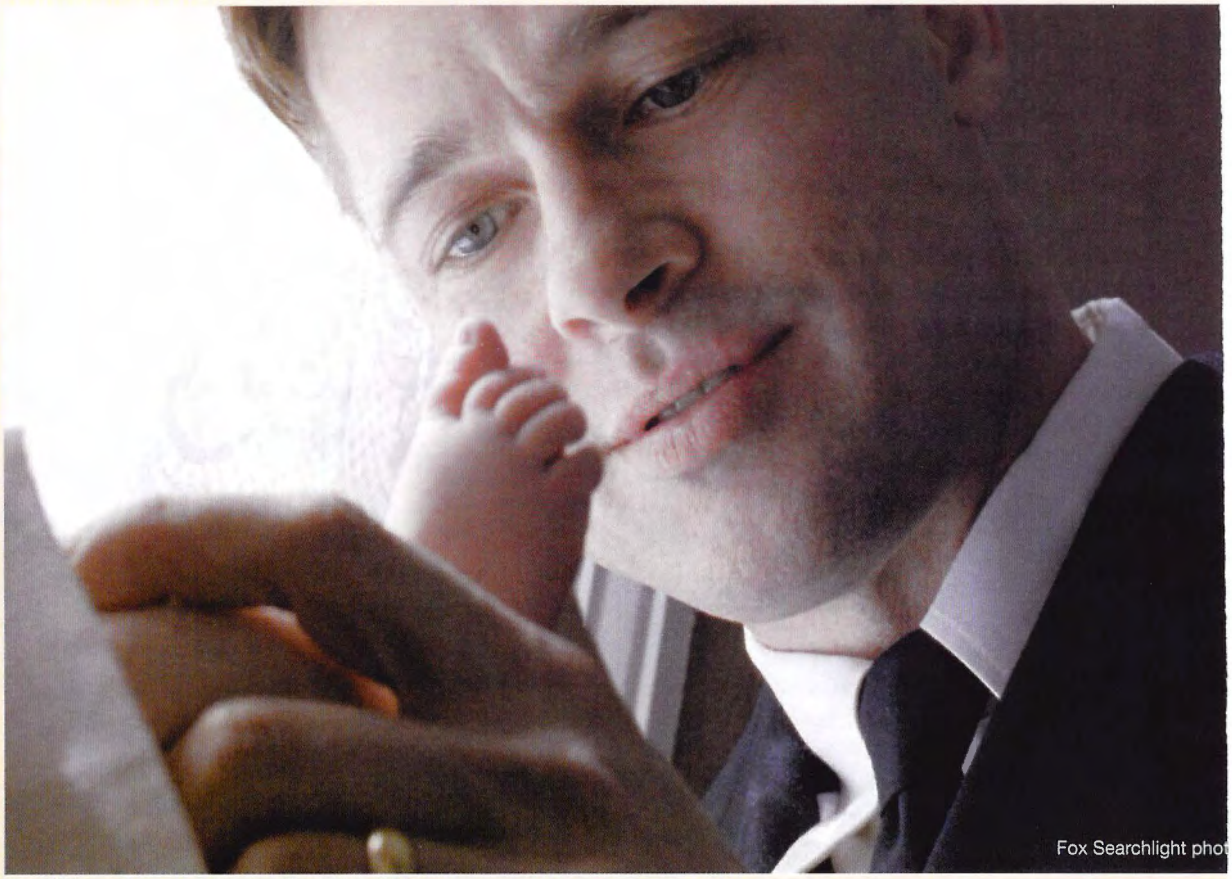
[3] See Margaret Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians, and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. "Chapter 1: The Corinthian *Diolkos*."

[4] Gary A. Anderson, "Mary in the Old Testament," *Pro Ecclesia* 16/1 (2007), pp. 33-55, esp. p. 38. See also Christopher R. Seitz, *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), esp. p. 227.

[5] Michael J. Gorman in the "Foreword" of *To Hear the Word* (pp. ix-xx).

[6] *Dei Verbum* 21; emphasis added.

[7] For the primary and persistent importance of the literal sense in 20th-century Roman Catholic exegesis alongside the other senses of Scripture, see the encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943).



Brad Pitt portrays a father in *The Tree of Life*.

Non-linear Verité

Review by Ken Ross

The Tree of Life is a profound and beautiful film that won the Palme d'Or Award at the Cannes Film Festival and ranked among the top films of 2011 by the National Board of Review. It is nominated for three Academy Awards (best picture, best director, and best cinematography). It is also a film very few Episcopalians have seen. This strikes me as odd, particularly in light of the director's background. Malick is married to Alexandra Wallace, the daughter of an Episcopal priest (and herself a graduate of the Seminary of the Southwest), attended St. Stephen's Episcopal School, and belongs to an Episcopal parish in Austin. In other words, he is one of our own.

Malick is unquestionably a man of intellectual and spiritual depth — a graduate of Harvard and Oxford who studied with Martin Heidegger in Germany. *The Tree of Life* is the product of a mature sensibility. Many years in gestation, it is a meditation on nothing less than the origin and meaning of life. The film's architecture, which is non-linear and non-narrative, demands much from its audience.

The Tree of Life
Directed by Terrence Malick
Fox Searchlight

An impressionistic story of a Midwestern family in the 1950s, the film follows the journey of the eldest son, Jack, through the innocence of childhood to his disillusioned adult years as he tries to reconcile a complicated relationship with his father (Brad Pitt). Jack (played as an adult by Sean Penn) finds himself a lost soul in the modern world, seeking answers to the origins and meaning of life while questioning the existence of faith.

The key to watching *The Tree of Life* is simply to let go and take it in. There is a dreamlike quality to the entire film that resists simple analysis but encourages introspection. *The Tree of Life* is built around the paired opposites of *grace* and *nature*, and seems tailor-made for a Jungian point of view. But the beauty of this film is that it will have different meanings for different people, depending on what they bring to it.

Its complexity and spiritual depth will confound those discomfited by a theological worldview. Nevertheless, many secular critics found the film profound and understood full well the power of Malick's vision. It is somewhat ironic that two of the film's stars, Sean Penn and Brad Pitt, were simultaneously intrigued and ill at ease with its frankly existential and phenomenological approach.

For Christians, Malick's film is at once familiar and strange. We relate to the humanness of the characters and their life experiences, but are also awestruck by the mystery and grandeur of God's creation and our place in it. From the chaos of Genesis to the denouement of John's Revelation, we live in a world bigger and more mysterious than we can ever imagine.

The best films resist simple analysis. They yield up their insights over time and sometimes in our dreams, as images and symbols emerge from that liminal space where intuition meets reason. For a popular culture that values — and understands — only those narratives that are simple, formulaic and linear, this film will be inscrutable. It is a frankly theological film. It requires both effort and abandon — effort in that it calls for introspection, abandon in that one must surrender to its mystery.

To a secular culture, this film is a poke in the ribs by the finger of God. Malick raises questions that most Westerners prefer not to think about too hard and certainly not out loud. For a prominent filmmaker to raise such questions undermines the prevailing secular worldview. Yet surprisingly, Christians have written relatively little about this film. The audience most likely to embrace its transcendent vision — us — seems strangely absent from the conversation.

As critic Franklin Laviola has said, *The Tree of Life* "makes explicit reference to a vast and eclectic body of literary, philosophical, and religious influences — the Book of Job, Gnosticism, Dante's Paradiso, Thomas à Kempis [and] American Transcendentalism." Peter Bradshaw, in *The Guardian*, said of the film that it "may well come to be seen as this decade's great Christian artwork."

For Christians, the work and purpose of *The Tree of Life* will only be grasped by and within the soul, and will only be apprehended over time by prayer and reflection, long after leaving the theater. Its narrative arc runs from the creation of the world to the eschaton, but the trajectory of that arc is complex and at times baffling. So, too, is life as we actually experience it. ■

Ken Ross works in the mineral exploration industry in the United States and West Africa and is a member of the Living Church Foundation.

Ash Wednesday at the Abbey (2011)

By Sam Keyes

Saint Benedict was right, I think, to sandwich prayer
With cats and ticks, with milk and manure.
Here the world protests, as life springs
From mounds of snow, the invasion of discipline,
The awkwardness of silence and ashes and penitent hearts.

But when the sun melts things, it turns out there is
Work to be done before the final Beauty comes.
And so we rake our hearts, use sin as fertilizer,
Till nought becomes ought, and the roads and fields
Are clear, and the destination looms
Like the bell for vespers.

The Sin of Uzzah

A CONFESSION

By John Mason Lock

Wherefore I dare not, I, put forth my hand
To hold the Ark, although it seems to shake
Through th' old sinnes and new doctrines of our land.

—George Herbert, "The Priesthood"

In 2003, I decided that I could no longer be an Episcopalian, and I certainly could not contemplate ordination in the Episcopal Church. General Convention's approval of Gene Robinson's election as a bishop was tantamount to a rejection of the Bible and its authority. I spent the fall of 2003, the final semester of my undergraduate studies, attending a Russian Orthodox Church. Orthodoxy appeared like a light on a hill: its bishops and priests were free from gross doctrinal errors; disturbing liturgical innovations were non-existent. Perhaps this is the place to wait out the storm of secularism that has assailed the churches in North America?

That winter, as a fresh graduate, I spent a few weeks at a monastery trying to discern a next step. Although I felt called to ministry, ordination seemed like a closed door: an impossibility in the compromised Episcopal Church; a very distant hope in the Orthodox Church in which I was not even a cat-

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The Sin of Uzzah

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echumen. I spent a good deal of the day reading, particularly the recommendations of the Abbot. One of these was Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*, which caused such a stir because of Bonhoeffer's allusion to "religionless Christianity."

But the document that spoke directly to my situation was Bonhoeffer's essay "After Ten Years," written in veiled language and addressed to his peers in the Nazi resistance. Bonhoeffer addressed the problem of whether it is "more responsible to take the field like a Don Quixote against a new age, or to admit one's defeat, accept the new age, and agree to serve it" (p. 29). The Episcopal Church was certainly confronting a new age, and the alternatives appeared to be either armchair criticism or opportunism which capitulates to the new age.

It was clear that until then I had been the former, merely an outraged critic, criticizing the Episcopal Church from the comfort of my intellectual and ecclesiastical freedom. But Bonhoeffer concludes that neither alternative is acceptable, writing that Christians "must take our share of responsibility for the moulding of history in every situation and at every moment, whether we are the victors or the vanquished" (pp. 29-30).

I was born and baptized into the Episcopal Church; surely my responsibility is to address, as best as I am able, the ways in which the church is compromised. My flirtation with Orthodoxy had not amounted to a serious commitment to Orthodoxy in itself, but rather a running away from the Episcopal Church. As Jonah and Elijah prove, running away is never consonant with God's purposes. As "the responsible man," therefore, I would undertake to change the Episcopal Church for the better, in as much capacity as I was granted. The Episcopal Church would be my Alamo, even in the face of likely, maybe even inevitable defeat.

While these may be clear and helpful ideas to one who is running away, the impulse at the heart of them is ultimately prideful and earthbound; it is sin, a rejection of and rebellion against God's gracious rule and authority. While theological progressives were rejecting the authority of the Bible, I was rejecting the authority of God.

Chapter six of 2 Samuel contains one of those bloody, disturbing episodes which can make some mistakenly claim that the God of the Old Testament is solely a figure of wrath and judgment. King David intends to move the sojourning Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, where the power of state and religion can be united in one city.

According to ritual law, the Levites were not permitted to touch the Ark except by wooden poles put through loops on the sides of the Ark (Numbers 4:15). Abinadab, a Levite, and his two sons, Uzzah and Ahio, place the Ark onto an ox cart. David and the people worshiped before the Lord as they led the Ark up to Jerusalem, but "when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (6:6-7).

The sin of Uzzah — that which merits the just judgment of God — is not merely in his formal transgression of the Law but in his willful action to try to save the Ark. Is God not able to look after his own?

The sin of Uzzah — that which merits the just judgment of God — is not merely in his formal transgression of the Law but in his willful action to try to save the Ark. Is God not able to look after his own?

Uzzah's action reveals that his answer to this question is *no*. His transgression was a negation of a recurring motif and theme of God as the agent of Israel's salvation.

It is when Moses holds up his hands that the Hebrews triumph over the Amalekites (Ex. 17:8-15). After marching with the Ark around the city for seven days and blowing trumpets, the Israelites conquer Jericho (Josh. 6). Gideon must send home most of his army before he and his small band of men defeat the Midianites, "lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, 'Mine own hand hath saved me'" (Judges 7:2). If God may save his people by miraculous means, could he not, in his holiness, look after his own Ark, the very seat of his presence?

Like Uzzah, I have answered *no*. I have convinced myself that enough hard work and diligence might save the Episcopal Church from destruction. But this salvation is entirely on the plane of human effort and work: political maneuvering, at its most crass, but even pastoral ministry undertaken with the goal to foment grassroots change, at its least offensive to human standards.

The Greek word for *church* means assembly or gathering. Perhaps, as a declining church, we have become so focused on rebuilding, attracting young people and young families, that we have forgotten who gathers and assembles the one, true, Catholic Church: Jesus Christ, the Lord. He calls men and women out of every nation, tribe, and tongue to faith in him, as the crucified and risen one, the promise of a new humanity, engendered by his death and resurrection.

The sin of Uzzah is to overestimate our part in this assembling of his body, the Church. The standpoint of Christian faith is necessarily eccentric; that is, we must renounce ourselves — our will, purposes and works — and offer the center to the Lord and his justifying grace. It is a lack of faith in the Lord himself that would compel one to think that human work could improve or save the Church.

My response to this revelation can only be penitence for my faithlessness. My work and effort can only be at best contingent, secondary, and ancillary to the Lord's primary and necessary redemptive work in the Church. The salvation of the Episcopal Church or any other ecclesiastical institution cannot be based on political maneuvering or diligently building "traditional" congregations or even on such well-intentioned things as the Anglican Covenant and the Instruments of Communion, but only on the sole name under heaven given to man through whom we may receive salvation: Jesus Christ.

I and many others stay in the Episcopal Church because of our historical attachment to this particular institution, but I hope that my future commitment will be based more upon my conviction that Anglicanism — in its frank yet not fanatical biblicism, its historic editions of the Book of Common Prayer, its hymnody,

(Continued on next page)

CATHOLIC VOICES
The Sin of Uzzah

(Continued from previous page)

its Articles and order — is a church in which our Lord can use me to gather his people. Where else can one find put so gravely the reality of our rebellion and sin on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the greater reality of the objective and final sacrifice for sins and redemption that Christ made on our behalf?

The Episcopal Church has clearly much more trial and adversity to face. No one contests this. I suggest that our time is like that of Jeremiah or Ezekiel, who saw the religious and political foundations of Jerusalem uprooted. In our own day as in theirs, the ecclesiastical landscape is filled with false prophets and false hopes.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel advised the people to understand their calamities not through the lens of political power but through the lens of God's judgment and grace. All this was befalling them because of their faithlessness, but even in this judgment, grace was offered of a future hope, not merely of a restoration to a former, idyllic past, but a greater future in which God would remake and renew his people.

In our own time, it would be easy to blame particular events or point to demographic studies to describe the decline of the Episcopal Church and the discord in the Anglican Communion. But ours is a time of judgment for our unfaithfulness and the unfaithfulness of our fathers to the Lord. There is grace, though, hidden in this judgment.

Therefore, we hope, not because we have confidence in our efforts to stem ecclesiastical chaos or a reasonable hope for a restoration to the idyllic Episcopal Church of the 1950s. It is difficult to say what that grace will be, except that, because it is a grace hidden in judgment, it will involve a death. ■

The Rev. John Mason Lock is curate of All Souls' Episcopal Church, Oklahoma City.

LETTERS

Community Disbands

An addendum to Douglas LeBlanc's article on the Cathedral of Christ the King [TLC, Feb. 12]: the Parish Church of Christ the King, the congregation which originally met at the cathedral before it was sold, moved to a suburban area known as Texas Corners south of Oshtemo, Michigan.

As of January 8, 2012, the congregation has disbanded and the furnishings are being distributed by Canon William Spaid on behalf of the parish and Bishop Robert Gepert. After the Very Rev. Cynthia Black left, various retired clergy (including myself) supplied Sunday services for a dwindling congregation.

It is a sad end to the vision of Bishop Charles E. Bennison, who saw the Cathedral as a church along what he termed the "main street of the Midwest" (Interstate 94). Given the unique architecture and artwork, the cathedral had also been a site visited by tourists in the Kalamazoo area.

The Rev. Joseph C. Neiman
Paw Paw, Michigan

Editor's note: Fr. Neiman, retired editor of the *Western Michigan Episcopalian* and former rector of St. Mark's Church in Paw Paw, wrote about the cathedral's closure for THE LIVING CHURCH in August 2007. The text of his article is appended to LeBlanc's review (goo.gl/JHoQs).

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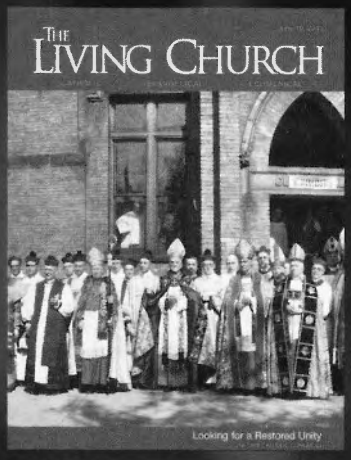
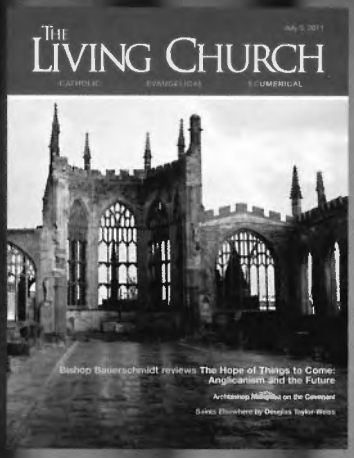
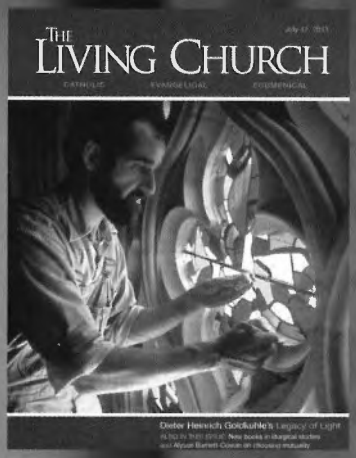
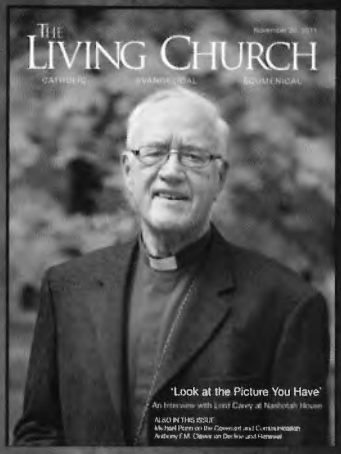
– The Very Rev. Dr. Joseph H. Britton, dean of the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale and associate dean for Anglican Studies at Yale Divinity School









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SUNDAY'S READINGS | Lent 1, Feb. 26

Gen. 9:8-17 • Ps. 25:1-9 • 1 Peter 3:18-22 • Mark 1:9-15

Secure in a Storm

Let not the devil defeat you; let Christ crush his miserable head. If God is for us, who can be against us? Throw open the door of your heart and let Christ come in to break the bread of his presence and pour out his sacrificial potion; let him say the irrevocable word whose vestiges are upon the worn pages of prophets, the litigation of laws, the rise and fall of kingdoms, the evenings and mornings of events and wonders. The victory is final and the work complete.

How do we know? In the height of heaven and reaching to our humble home, an arc of colored light leads the contemplative eye over space and time. "Never again will I destroy all flesh by a deluge of water," says the living God. "My bow will appear in the heavens and I will remember my eternal contract" (Gen. 9:15,16). This peace, this security, grounded in the Living Christ, is now the center of our being. Not I, but Christ who lives.

With an open heart, we open another door, the one which leads into the world. The wind rushes, waters rage and foam, a riot of noise is waiting, not only from turbulent towns and blaring cities, but even in places of solitary wonder, pristine beauty, and brutal aseity. The world is waiting. How, in the perfect freedom of Christ, are we free to make our way in the world?

The bow in the heavens, the sign of our security, will, nonetheless, recall a frightful storm. Victory is secure but the battle is hardly over. Thus, at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, he is said to be driven by the Spirit into the wilderness where the devil prepares a trial. The devil does not drive him but the Spirit, for this trial is essential to Jesus' identity and mission. In the desert and in every moment of his ministry Jesus is mortified in flesh, made alive in the Spirit (1 Peter). Temptations dance before his eyes, demons dare to name him. We know who you are! Jesus persists in absolute fidelity, and the angels minister to him. The Son of righteousness and the Angel of darkness will meet again.

In the decisive moment of the cross Jesus defeats death and the devil, a victory whose reach is universal. As the old theologians say, "If he did not assume it, he did not save it." He assumed — took onto himself — what we are so that we might become what he is. The enigmatic mention, in the Epistle of First Peter, of Christ's descent among the dead requires our slow and careful attention. For this theme, though a tangential point in Scripture, is taken up in both the Christian East and West, imposing a deep influence upon icons, piety, and theology. What was Jesus doing between his death and resurrection? A story fills this vacuum, one whose theological truth, if not its narrative details, we may unfailingly affirm. Did not God save a righteous family in the story of Noah and the Ark? Was not God saving all along? Thus there must be salvation for those trapped in the shadow of death prior to Jesus' arrival. If Jesus does not reach everyone, he does not reach anyone. Thus he descends to the dead, breaks the two crossed leaves of hell's doors, and raises Adam and Eve and their descendants. Whosoever will, let him come!

Baptized into Christ, we have put on Christ, vested for storm and battle. But offer the world no show of violence. Let Christ pull you from hell.

Look It Up

Read 1 Peter 3:19. In hell? Christ breaks the gate.

Think About It

On the hard wood of the cross, he is reaching for you.

SUNDAY'S READINGS | Lent 2, March 4

Gen. 17:1-7, 15-16 • Ps. 22:22-30 • Rom. 4:13-25 • Mark 8:31-38

Hearing and Returning

The trouble with Peter, and the reason he is momentarily called Satan, is that he does not "sense" the things of God. And although we believe we have a better grasp of the theological landscape with its imposing sufferings and bitter betrayals, its raging violence, and cryptic invitation to carry the cross, our sense and perception may prove no better: "When tribulations and persecutions arise on account of the Word, immediately they are scandalized" (Mark 4:17). Must Jesus stand alone forever, a man of sorrow and grief? Do we love him? Did we ever love him?

The collect for the Second Sunday in Lent mentions "all who have gone from your ways" (BCP, p. 218). Thus we call to mind instances when the summons to follow was clear and the response prompt and faithful. God calls Abram from his retirement home in Mesopotamia. Mimicking modes of Mesopotamian speech, God is *El Shaddai*, the God of the Mountain. And, while the Mount God is likely to demand that he be worshiped at a high and celestial place, this God requires instead ambulation and perfections. Walk before me. Be perfect. Promises ensue: You will be the father of many nations; I will give to you and your seed the land of your sojourn, the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding (Gen. 17:3-8). If we detect international turmoil as the only fruit of this promise, we yet fail to sense the things of God. Giving a new name to Abram and Sarai, calling them Abraham and Sarah, God announces *newness* and *universal blessing* to the nations. Astoundingly, Abraham sets forth, being 99 years old.

The aged may still hear the voice. On Feb. 23 in the year 156, Polycarp stood in the amphitheatre at Smyrna answering the proconsul who demanded he curse Christ. "Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" Others who come, though less advanced in age, come as if prematurely gray. For all hear an ancient voice of promise, the same voice that calls all things into being, pursues an errant humanity, speaks with such articulate resonance as to become in the fullness of time the Word. The Word speaks (John 1:18). The Word calls and they follow: Simon and Andrew, James and John, Levi and a whole pack of publicans. They come to the promise and font of life. St. Paul, who is by no means adverse to legitimate law, calling our vocation the "obedience of faith" and laboring for unity and order in the Church, insists, nonetheless, that the calling of Christ is not a matter of mere law or inheritance. To every generation God issues a promise which, by a prevenient prompting, is accepted *ex fide*. If another attending claim even slightly diminishes the profligate wonder of salvation, faith is emptied and the promise abolished.

Why have we gone astray? We fear the cost, no doubt, but we also find ourselves at times caught as if in a web of cares and worries. The liturgical source from which today's collect takes its form says that "our souls are deceived by a diabolic fraud." God would rescue us from this pernicious liar; God would return us to the "foundation of truth." First, however, *omni heredica perversitati depula* (every heretical perversity pushed out of the way), we come again to the truth. Christ would break in, bind the strong man, and let us hear anew his voice, which, though a calling to his cross, is finally a calling to life and peace. Christ would have us "sense" that we are dying and rising with him.

Look It Up

Read the collect for the Second Sunday in Lent (BCP 1979, p. 218). Hold fast.

Think About It

The Word is addressing you.

(**EYEWITNESS** from page 6)

sequence begins with Robinson preaching at a downtown New York parish immediately before a gay pride parade. Parishioners will join Robinson in handing out cups of water to the marchers, and he reminds the Manhattan congregation that these are not just party refreshments.

"It's a very holy thing that you do when you offer that cup of water," he says. "You are representing the community of Christians and Jews and Muslims who are 95 percent the source of all the oppression we LGBT people have experienced in our lives. So when you offer a cup of water bearing the name of Christ … you are the oppressor offering a cup of water to the oppressed. They get it. They get the act of compassion. My question is, do you get it?"

Disagreements on the authority of Scripture arise only in passing in the film, which naturally does not tread too deeply into theology. During the Pasadena Q&A, however, Robinson addressed the topic head-on.

"I think one thing is to remember that arguing particular verses of Scripture, generally speaking, doesn't move us very far," he said. "Because before you can ever argue any of those verses, you actually have to argue about how we regard that book. Whether it be the Jewish Scriptures or the Christian Scriptures, we at least have to be honest about whether we regard those Scriptures as the Word of God or the words of God — whether it was divinely inspired or divinely dictated. And if you're coming from those two very different regards from those holy texts, then you're actually arguing from different planets, and it's very, very hard."

Robinson added: "All the research shows that while that gets us not very far, what gets us there are stories — individual stories. This very conservative evangelical pastor in Park City asked me to just tell my story. He's a young guy, smart and charismatic and obviously very successful in what he's doing. How could it be in 2012 that he had never sat with a gay person and listened to their story? But let me tell you, the country is full of 'em. And those of us on the East Coast and Left Coast forget that in the middle, this is news to people! … Nothing does it like telling a story, which is part of why the movie was made."

In that regard, a sort of evangelistic outreach is planned in conjunction with the rollout of the documentary. Robinson said moviegoers should not expect to see *Love Free or Die* in many theaters. Instead, the plan is to make a DVD available to individuals and congregations through the film's website (lovefreeordiemovie.com), with an emphasis on group showings for "the movable middle."

"We are asking that everyone who sees the movie invite a person — a family member, a coworker, a former classmate — who are among that large group of people who for the most part love us. They know us, they think positively about us, but they still go in the voting booth and vote against us," Robinson said. "You know about that here in California."

Robinson repeatedly referred to an iconic "Aunt Betty" as the film's target audience. "Make it your project this year to call them up and say, 'Aunt Betty, you remember how we had that little altercation at Thanksgiving? Can I get you out for coffee, and let's talk about that?'" Robinson said. "And then, it looks as if this will be showing on PBS in the fall, and … we're working on getting it shown on Thanksgiving weekend. So you'll be at home with Aunt Betty, and you can have a better conversation this time."

Chris Willman is a veteran entertainment reporter based in Los Angeles.

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