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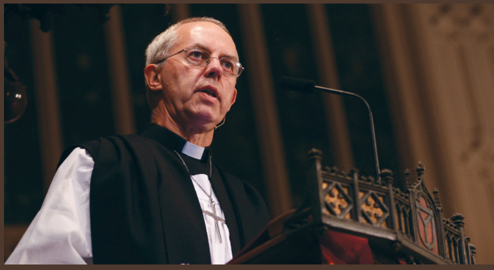

ON THE COVER

"We must be courageous in our confidence that the gospel is the right thing for people." —Archbishop Justin Welby (see "Archbishop: Take Risks for the Gospel," p. 4).

Photo courtesy of Trinity Wall Street

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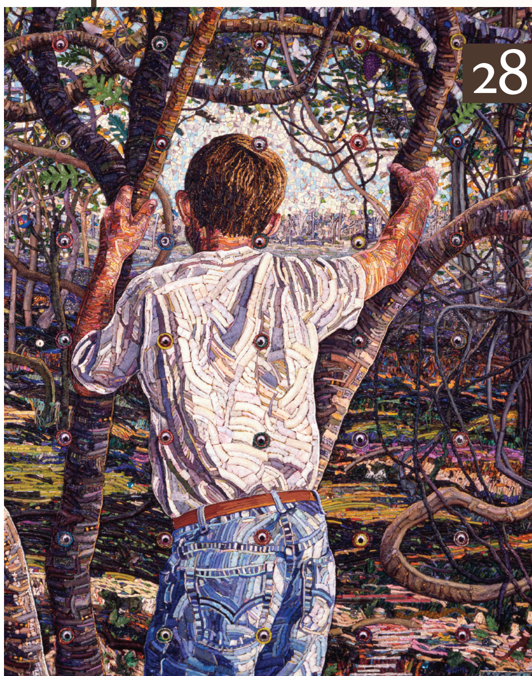

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We are grateful to the Diocese of Tennessee [p. 35], whose generous support helped make this issue possible.

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.

Archbishop Justin Welby yoked compassion to social action in his address at the Trinity Institute.
Photo courtesy Trinity Wall Street

Archbishop: Take Risks for the Gospel

Like other leaders on the world stage, the Archbishop of Canterbury is calling for long-term responses to a rising tide of Islamic terrorism and the societal conditions that incubate extremism.

But in an interview with TLC, Archbishop Justin Welby broke with other public figures who have avoided theological issues in their search for economic or political solutions. He sees a role for Christian evangelism among Muslims, even in regions where it's dangerous or unlawful.

"The solutions are going to be in the ideological challenge to the basis of terrorism and providing an alternative narrative that is more exciting than the ones that people like [the Islamic State] and Boko Haram and the Taliban are offering," Welby said.

Mainstream religious leaders must impart a renewed sense of adventure, vocation, and challenge, which is about changing the world for the better, Welby said. Sharing the gospel among Muslims can be part of that renewal.

"Jesus calls us to go make disciples of all nations," Welby said, adding that evangelism must never be done by manipulation or underhanded means. "We must be courageous in our confidence that the gospel is the right thing for people."

Welby gave the interview during Trinity Institute 2015, a two-day conference at Trinity Wall Street in New York City, where he and other speakers addressed economic inequality as a moral issue. From scripted speeches to more relaxed conversations, he delivered a consistent message: what's needed from the Church is courage.

Being courageous is not solely about evangelism for Welby, but that's part of it. When asked if Christians should seek to win converts in Muslim countries, he answered: "Yeah!" And they should do it even where Christian evangelism is illegal, including wide swaths of the Middle East and North Africa.

"This is what the apostles answered: *do we obey God or human beings?*" Welby said.

He recalled breaking the law to advance the gospel. "When I was young and when we were first married, we smuggled Bibles into communist countries," he said. "That was illegal in those countries. That was *strictly* illegal."

At a full-house opening service, he exhorted worshipers in a 17-minute homily to transform their society and to expect difficult moments as they grapple with moral responsibilities.

Welby argued the next day in his opening talk that equality is a biblical principle. It's encoded in creation, and manifest in the Garden of Eden and in the visions of prophets. Yet today's economic and political systems have begun to safeguard wealth and power in perpetuity, and to prevent upward mobility among the poor.

Permanent wealth marks an injustice, in Welby's interpretation, and the systems that enable it need reforming. Reform will require courage to confront people who spend enormous sums to control lawmaking, regulations, and enforcement.

In the later interview, he answered questions by invoking current events, citing Bible verses, even quoting Shakespeare's *Henry IV*.

When asked what's needed to confront Islamic terrorism, he said with a brief, wide smile and a chuckle: "You do realize that if I had the simple, straightforward, one-sentence

answer that I should be the President of the United States of America."

The archbishop laid out a moral imperative, yoking compassion to social action. He urged Anglicans worldwide to pray for persecuted Christians who suffer at the hands of extremists, but not to say *amen* and be done. What else can they do? Be courageous, and be with those enduring persecution. Be with them in body as well as spirit.

He suggested a role for courage on the home front, too. Welby had said last fall at the Church of England's General Synod that "sufficiency is in loving those with whom we disagree." What might this love look like in North America, where hundreds of congregations left the Episcopal Church to join the Anglican Church in North America? Should the Episcopal Church work toward reconciliation with the ACNA?

"From my far from lofty position, I'm not going to start lecturing, *What TEC needs to do is*," he said, adopting the mock voice of a stern British schoolmaster. "I'm just not going to do that. But what does it look like? I'll talk about something I know about in England."

Welby described how the Church of England is managing its transition to women in the episcopate, beginning with the consecration of the Rt. Rev. Libby Lane on January 26. And February 2 brought the consecration of the Rev. Philip North, who believes only men should be bishops.

The two events within a week caused "quite a hoo-ha," Welby said, but an adopted set of guiding principles stands to help everyone remember where their unity lies.

"For putting these principles into practice, implementation is a real struggle," Welby said. "But the Church is committed to the mutual flourishing — not because we agree with one another, but because we are all in Christ."

Throughout his brief visit Welby exhorted Americans to resist silent complicity. He made clear that God's people should not cower in the presence of bullies — nor should they placate unjust regimes, nor be content with seemingly safe distance from fellow believers of a different political or theological stripe, nor countenance those keen to concentrate power forever in the hands of a select few.

Modern society may be tempted to let fear cut a path to moral paralysis. But for Justin Welby, the Church should have no part of it.

G. Jeffrey MacDonald

'Allow Suffering to Speak'

Economic inequality is not going away. Nor is the intensifying debate about what the Church should do about it. Widening opportunity gaps between rich and poor have convinced Church leaders and public intellectuals that the faithful have a role to play in making sure everyone can flourish without their economic

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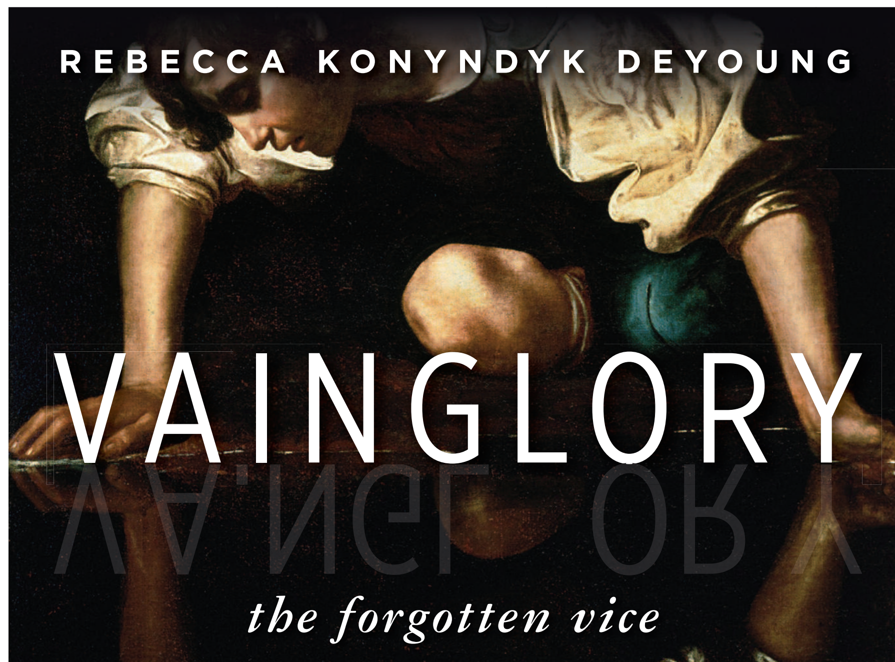

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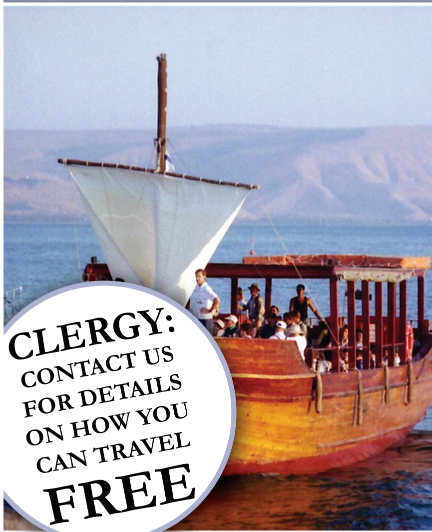

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'Allow Suffering to Speak'

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destinies being sealed at birth. To ignore systemic disparities and their consequences would be to neglect a mounting moral responsibility.

But leading thinkers differ on the pivotal question of *how* to help those who have fallen behind. And unlike Washington debates, this one does not hinge entirely on finding the right role for government.

At issue is whether people of faith should seek a new solidarity across classes, or join with low-income segments for a long, hard fight to wrest power from the wealthy. If the Church has influence to wield, should it focus on wealth redistribution? Or confront factors associated with stubborn poverty, including substance abuse and broken families?

Rusty Reno, editor of *First Things*, drew a few nods of support and many scowls of disapproval for his analysis of the roots of inequality. As an example, he cited sharply declining life expectancy among poor, undereducated whites in America.

"Their life expectancy is not collapsing because of the fact that 80 people have as much wealth as half the world," Reno said at a January conference at Trinity Wall Street in New York. "It's collapsing because their lives are in disarray, they have Type 2 diabetes, they're using drugs."

He cited more social problems, including how children are frequently growing up without a mother and father in the home, as indicators of an urgent need for family-strengthening initiatives and renewed solidarity among rich, poor, and everyone in between.

Moments later, author Rachel Held Evans pushed back. She called for well-off people to examine their consumeristic and self-absorbed lives, which she faulted for being intentionally disconnected from the poor.

"That's immoral," she said. "We can't pin it all on women having children out of wedlock," she said, generating applause from a crowd of mostly Episcopalians who had bristled, in tweets and later questioning, at Reno's angle.

These fault lines, as well as much common ground, came to light at the 44th Trinity Institute, which convenes once a year for theological reflection on social issues. The location, just steps from Wall Street brokerages and the origins of the Occupy Wall Street movement, made the topic of inequality all the more resonant. Participation levels suggested organizers had indeed struck a chord. More than 330 participants filled the nave for lectures and panel discussions, while another 105 sites convened viewers via video link in the United States and abroad.

"Among younger people, there's definitely an interest in this issue," said Nick Deere, pastoral resident at First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia, where he's preparing for a vocation in ministry.

Statistics on inequality have helped tweak the Church's conscience. With one in three children living in relative poverty, the United States has the sixth-highest child poverty rate in the developed world, according to UNICEF. Meanwhile, the top 10 percent of earners brought in 46 percent of the nation's income in 2010, up from about 32 percent in 1970. Inequality is seen as "a very big problem" in the eyes of 46 percent of Americans, according to a 2014 Pew Research Center survey.

The Church's emerging response is not built on a premise that wealth is evil, or that full income equity across society is somehow a desirable ideal. Reno warned that equality-centered ideologies are dangerous as they lead too easily to totalitarian regimes. The Archbishop of Canterbury shared that concern.

Archbishop Justin Welby also cautioned against stereotyping the top "one percent" of earners as heartless or disinterested in others' struggles. He said the faithful can even find pe-

titions for continued prosperity in the Book of Common Prayer. He urged the well-off to be inspired by the philanthropy of Bill Gates and Warren Buffet.

"The biblical injunction is not against all personal wealth," Welby said. "In the Bible, there is a respect for those who create wealth for the common good." But systems that allow wealth to corrupt and allow for abuse do run afoul of the biblical injunction, he said.

That's a point where consensus seems to be gelling: the Church should challenge systems that keep the rich wealthy for generations and keep the poor impoverished. The body of Christ cannot stand by in such a situation for reasons that go to the core of the faith.

Christian philosopher Cornel West put some of those reasons into words. He said the Church sees the world through the lens of the cross, which means caring first and foremost for "the least of these," a reference to Matthew 25:40. Because the faithful are redeemed through the cross, they are empowered to face the truth about themselves — sinful in disturbing particulars, yet redeemed in Christ. Thus they are able to call attention to injustices that others might find too unnerving or too disruptive to bring to light.

"Who has the courage to tell the truth?" West asked in his keynote address. "For Christians, and we get this from our Jewish brothers and sisters in Hebrew Scripture, the condition of truth is to allow suffering to speak."

The suffering is near at hand, speakers said, for those with eyes to see. Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America*, detailed how expensive and stressful it is to be poor.

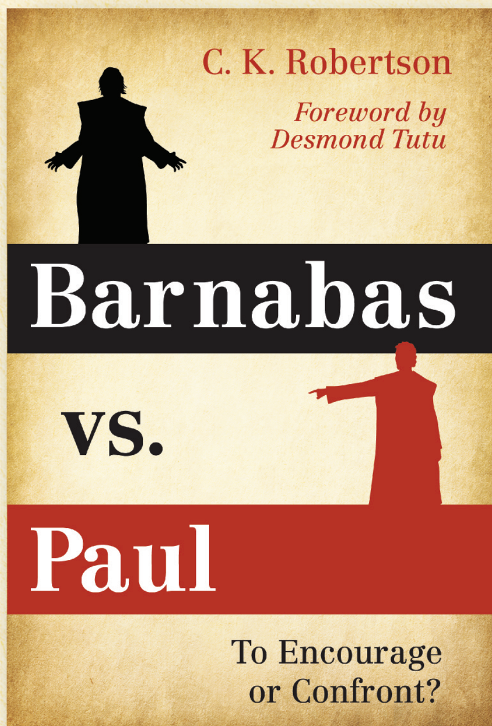
She cited examples. Being poor means relying on high-interest credit cards and payday loans to buy essentials. People with scant means are passed over for jobs when employers run their credit. They are charged fees or imprisoned for non-compliance with municipal ordinances, such as when their children skip school. In 40 states, if the poor go to jail, they can be charged for room and board.

Points of tension in the debate, however, keep coming back to the question of what the Church is to do. Ehrenreich, a self-described nonbeliever, proposed the Church undertake a new "moral crusade" to persuade employers to pay higher wages to workers on the lowest rungs. It might help confront the moral deficit she sees in both the private and public sectors.

"What I see is a system of mindless sadism," Ehrenreich said. "Could we just stop the meanness?"

Ehrenreich said her job is to help develop a sense of class solidarity that transcends racial barriers, empowers poor workers to organize, and enables them to share in more of the wealth they have helped create. It could potentially include people in the professions, including journalists and adjunct professors, who also find

(Continued on page 32)



Barnabas vs. Paul: To Encourage or Confront

by C. K. Robertson

"… Canon Robertson helps us see St. Paul as he was, a liberator who understood that the gospel brings those who are far off and those who are near closer to one another. We must ever "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" Holy Scripture. This glimpse into the lives and ministries of Paul and Barnabas can help us do that, as we learn from them and stand for the glorious liberation to which God calls us all."–**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**

The Rev. Dr. C. K. Robertson is canon to the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church and distinguished visiting professor at General Theological Seminary in New York City.

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Maryland Seeks Bishop's Resignation

In a letter dated January 26, the Diocese of Maryland's eight-member standing committee has asked that the Rt. Rev. Heather E. Cook resign from her work as suffragan bishop.

The committee "arrived at this decision after significant and prayerful discernment, and with due and proper consideration for the best interests of the diocese and its people," the letter said. "We continue to hold you in our prayers."

On December 28 the diocese identified Bishop Cook as the driver in an accident that killed cyclist Thomas Palermo on December 27. On January 9 the state's attorney for Baltimore brought several charges against Cook, including vehicular manslaughter, driving under the influence, texting while driving, and leaving the scene of the accident.

"It was clear that our lay and clergy leaders on the standing committee felt that the best interests of the diocese would be served were Heather to resign," said the Rt. Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton, Bishop of Maryland. "Since this does not impede the Episcopal Church's investigation into the matter, it is my hope Heather will see the wisdom in this recommendation."

Cook is prohibited from resigning her orders as a bishop while the Episcopal Church's Title IV investigation proceeds. But the diocese believes nothing prevents her from resigning as a diocesan employee.

Redeemer Loses Vicar and Family

The vicar of Church of the Redeemer in Houston was found dead February 3 in the apartment he shared with his wife and their youngest son, age 5.

Police had not released the name of the priest, the Rev. Israel Ahimbisibwe, until the Diocese of Texas did so. Early reports said the priest, his wife, Dorcus, and their son Junior were beaten to death.

"It boggles my mind what could have happened," said church treasurer Dick Bird in a report by the *Houston Chronicle*. "Why would you kill a small child?"

Houston police have charged Isaac Tiharihondi, 19, the oldest son in the Ahimbisibwe family, with capital murder. Police believe that Tiharihondi used a hammer, a baseball bat, and a kitchen knife to bludgeon his parents and stab his 5-year-old brother.

Only two years earlier Church of the Redeemer had lost its longtime building. Soon after a final service in the nave, which decades earlier rang with songs of the charismatic renewal, demolition began on the building, which needed many repairs and posed possible threats to safety.

Dallas Nominates 4

After conducting a seven-month search, the Diocese of Dallas has announced a four-member slate for its next bishop. The slate draws a priest from within the diocese, a priest from the Diocese of West Texas, a priest from the Diocese of Tennessee, and an American-born seminary dean serving in Canada:

- The Rev. Michael Michie, 46, rector of St. Andrew's, McKinney, Texas
- The Rev. David G. Read, 49, rector of St. Luke's, San Antonio
- The Rev. R. Leigh Spruill, 51, rector of St. George's, Nashville
- The Rev. George R. Sumner, 59, principal of Wycliffe College, Toronto

The diocese accepted nominations by petition until February 16 and will announce any additional nominees by April 6. The election is scheduled for May 16, and a consecration service is set for November.

The Rt. Rev. James M. Stanton, sixth Bishop of Dallas, retired in May after serving for 21 years. More information on each of the nominees is available at dallasbishopsearch.org.

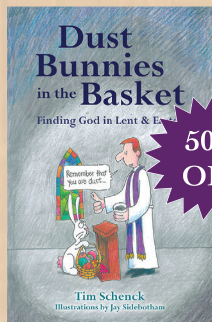
The questions for the season of a grown-up Lent are not, "What will you give up for Lent?" or even "What will you do for Lent?" but rather

"Who will you be in Lent?"

or even

"Whose will you be in Lent?"

- A Grown-Up Lent



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National Cathedral Unites Worshipers

Two Methodists led a service January 25 at Washington National Cathedral that celebrated interim eucharistic sharing between the United Methodist Church (UMC) and the Episcopal Church. The UMC's Council of Bishops approved interim eucharistic sharing in 2005. General Convention adopted a complimentary resolution in 2006.

The celebrant was the Rev. Gina Campbell, a 36-year veteran minister who became the cathedral's canon precentor in October 2012. Methodists have worked for the cathedral before: the Rev. Canon Alan Geyer was the cathedral's ecumenist for two years before he became its ethicist in 2000. But Campbell is the first Methodist to oversee all worship at the cathedral.

The Rev. Kim Cape, general secretary of the UMC's General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, preached. "We will sing our closing hymn by Charles Wesley today," she said. "Friends, Episcopalians, you gave us your best boys. Today we give you one of our best, as well, in Gina Campbell."

Campbell told of joining a meal in Mozambique in which 40 local believers ate simply while their guests began dividing five freshly roasted chickens.

"The men were sitting on benches, the women on the dirt floor, and the other women were passing through the people with wooden bowls, spooning out rice over which they poured a little chicken juice. It got harder to chew," she said.

"This five-chicken dinner was a sacramental act, this five-chicken dinner was a sacrifice. It was clear at that moment, that Christ was the host, the honored one. It was for Christ they gave their best, their all. It is at table with Christ as host that God is pleased.

"What would be your equivalent of an offering to God? What would be your five chicken dinner? What are we who have much willing to offer Christ? What is our best? Welcome a stranger? Feed the hungry? Cross divisions? Release our favorite wrong? Or do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God?"

Southeast Florida Picks New Bishop

The Diocese of Southeast Florida has elected the Very Rev. Peter Eaton, dean of St. John's Cathedral in Denver, as bishop coadjutor. Eaton, one of six nominees, was elected on the fourth ballot.

Eaton has been dean since 2002, and is an adjunct faculty member of Iliff School of Theology. He is a member of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations and writes book reviews for TLC.

A native of Washington, D.C., Eaton is a graduate of King's College, London, and Queens' College, University of Cambridge. He served churches in England and France before being received as a priest of the Episcopal Church in 1991.

The other nominees were the Rev. Michael J. Battle of Episcopal Divinity School, the Very Rev. DeDe Duncan-Probe of Virginia, the Rev. John C.N. Hall of Florida, the Rev. Allen F. Robinson of Baltimore, and the Rev. Canon Martin W. Zlatic of Florida.

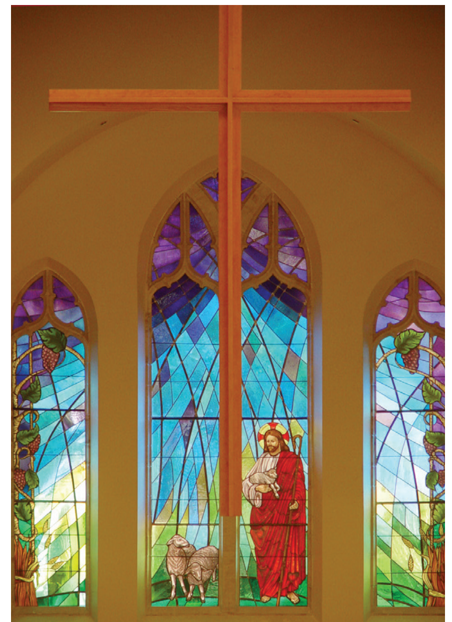
Twelfth Covenant Affirmation

The Anglican Church of Melanesia has announced its adoption of the Anglican Communion Covenant.

The Most Rev. David Vunagi, primate of the church, wrote to the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion that the province adopted the Covenant during its General Synod. The synod met November 8-14 at the Melanesian Haus in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Melanesia is the 12th province to adopt or subscribe to the Covenant.

Adapted from ACNS



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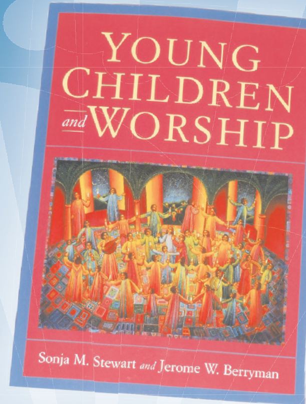

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ANALYSIS

Kenyans Debate Women as Bishops

By Francis Omondi

The appointment and now the consecration of the Rt. Rev. Libby Lane as Bishop Suffragan of Stockport prompted many conversations in the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK). Our ties with the Church of England have progressively loosened since March 1955, when Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher consecrated two Africans, one of them Festo Habakkuk Olang, who became the first archbishop of the Anglican Province of Kenya in 1970.

Many Kenyan Anglicans still regard the C of E as their mother church, and they watch events in faraway England carefully. Some now wonder how long it will be before Kenya has a woman among its bishops.

Not every Anglican in Kenya wants this change, and it is an irritation to conservatives. In October 2014 the ACK's House of Bishops declared a five-year moratorium on the possibility, but this has not silenced voices calling for change.

Some think that adding women to the episcopate is premature and requires more consideration. Most evangelical-leaning bishops oppose it altogether. Others think the matter should have been settled in 1990 when the Kenyan church approved ordaining women to the priesthood.

There are legal and constitutional issues to consider. Article VI, clauses 4 and 5 of the ACK Constitution make a clear demarcation between the work of a bishop and that of a priest. Clause 4 refers to bishops exclusively as male, while clause 5 recognizes that priests can be male or female.

In October a meeting of diocesan chancellors concluded that these incongruencies had no weight and did not prohibit women as bishops. The chancellors further observed that the national constitution of Kenya made illegal any form of sex-based discrimination in appointments to any leadership position. The chancellors concluded that

the church would lose if a woman appealed to a civil court after being barred from the episcopate.

The Most Rev. Eliud Wabukala, Archbishop of Kenya, asked bishops to approve amendments to the constitution that would dispel any doubts about women being eligible for election to the episcopate.

In December 2013 the Diocese of Eldoret overwhelmingly approved a motion to allow women in the episcopate. No one epitomises the mood of support more than the Rev. Elijah Yego, an influential priest, who changed his mind on the issue after deciding that many women exercise "superior ministry."

In August 2014 another synod, in the Diocese of Maseno West, unanimously approved the ordination of women as bishops. The Rt. Rev. Joseph Wasonga, Bishop of Maseno West, said the Kenyan church understood the episcopate as a functional office: "Ministry belongs to all who are baptised, be they men or women, and as such no one can deny the other an opportunity to serve in whatever capacity."

Perhaps more significantly, Kenya came close to having a woman bishop ahead of the Church of England. The Rev. Canon Rosemary Mbogo, provincial secretary of the ACK and chairwoman of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, was on the slate in the Diocese of Embu.

Proponents of women in the episcopate point out that the 1978 Lambeth Conference said member churches may ordain women as they chose. It was on this basis that the ACK agreed in 1980 to permit ordaining women as priests. Three years later the Rev. Lucia Okuthe became the first woman in the priesthood of the ACK. The Church of England began ordaining women as priests in 1994.

Dioceses may, in theory, act autonomously and elect women as bishops. It could be argued that the moratorium has a limited constitutional warrant. The real challenge lies with the fact that the more evangelical wing of the ACK is looking over its shoulder, concerned about working relationships outside Kenya.

American voices are influential too. The Rt. Rev. Bill Atwood of the Anglican Church of North America recently warned against taking action "that would be in opposition to Nigeria's position … that a decision to include women as bishops at this time would also be damaging to the Anglican Church in North America."

What is at stake is clear. The Rev. Ephraim Radner, professor of historical theology at Wycliffe College, wrote in *First Things*: "Within North America, churches like the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) that have separated from the Episcopal and Canadian churches are moving in a direction that may well prohibit women's ordination altogether.

"The already-existing divide between these groups and Canterbury is likely to widen," Radner said. "On the other hand, ordained women in ACNA and in other evangelical churches may well decide that their own vocations are better pursued back within Church of England-related Anglican churches, and one may see a strengthening of conservative female leadership there."

The Rev. Canon Francis Omondi
All Saints Cathedral, Nairobi

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LC2015-A

Shakespeare's God

By Anthony D. Baker

Literary criticism, at its best, is only a more sophisticated version of the impulse that excites us when we see a good movie or play or read a good book. We want to gather some people who have been similarly affected and talk about it. We have questions about odd points of the plot and hidden motivations of characters. We have ideas about how one bit of dialogue informs a later bit. We often have ideas about what the work "means." Whatever it is we want to say, the fact is we generally want to say it, and we want conversation partners who will humor us by listening, and hopefully even engage us by arguing.

Like the post-performance pub banter, the scholarly conversation tends to move in waves. Someone says something persuasive, frames our thinking on an issue, and we may still be discussing this idea years or decades after. Perhaps then someone will return to an older idea and consider it in light shed by the turns in the discussion. This in turn may be the new frame for years to come.

This is precisely what has taken place in Shakespeare studies, in that portion of the immense industry devoted to questions of religion. Beginning in the 1930s, G. Wilson Knight's rich and complex reading of the plays included an assortment of connections to Christian theology. Roland Frye's *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (1963) challenged "the School of Knight," arguing that the plays were meant, as Hamlet said to his own band of players, simply to hold a "mirror up to nature." At this point the conversation shifted, and the Shakespeare and religion (Christianity, theology) talk was more like marginal mutterings at the edge of the bar. We tended to assume that Shakespeare was a secular humanist, perhaps with pagan leanings, perhaps Christian, but in no way would a study of religion illuminate the dramas or sonnets.

This has changed, and now alongside the questions of gender, politics, and dramatic theory, the industry is taking up again, though in a new way, the question of Shakespeare and religion.

Alison Shell's *Shakespeare and Religion* is an excellent pathway into the field. She opens her book with a description of the carvings on the misericords, wooden prayer benches, in Shakespeare's Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. Many of these are grotesque, some hilarious, and others simply confusing: a woman with a mouthful of sausage, human-headed beasts, monkeys playing doctor. The point, she tells us, is that all of the strangeness and silliness exists in church, in view of the high altar. Shakespeare's dramas, like those carvings, are creative experiments with the funny and the strange; but if we read this as secular we seriously mistake the context in which he wrote them.

Oddly though, having set us up to read the plays "in church," Shell goes to great lengths to tell us that we shouldn't. Shakespeare uses biblical and theological ideas, she says, but as tools to build aesthetically oriented dramas; that is, "Shakespeare was a subsumer" (p. 117). In one sense this is surely correct: these are neither sermons nor morality plays, but complex and often

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Shakespeare's dramas, like those carvings, are creative experiments with the funny and the strange; but if we read this as secular we seriously mistake the context in which he wrote them.

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ambiguous accounts of power, disguise, death, and reconciliation. Surely, though, "difficult" need not equate with "theologically incoherent"?

As Shell forays into the highly disputed territory of Shakespeare's religious convictions, she continues to combine penetrating insight with a certain theological obtuseness. She challenges the Catholic Shakespeare school — appropriately, in my view — with what she calls Shakespeare's "high doctrine of the audience": the religious traces in the plays are less about his own convictions than they are references to Scripture, liturgy, and theological polemic that he expected theatergoers to recognize. Still, she cannot resist weighing in on the question, and here she paints herself into a corner: if, as the mounting evidence seems to suggest, he was Roman Catholic, he was the sort of Catholic who "sacrificed theological coherence on the altar of imaginative amplitude." A disappointing one, in other words. Perhaps even a hypocritical one. Again, though, this is a necessary conclusion only if there can be nothing theological beyond a sermonizing or explicit moralism. Is it not possible that "imaginative amplitude" might in fact make one a better Catholic and/or Anglican?

In *Shakespeare's Common Prayers* Daniel Swift stays agnostic on the question of ecclesial affiliation, but agrees with Shell's argument that we fail to hear Shakespeare if we forget how the world in which he wrote was stuffed with religious language. Swift fills an important hole in the new conversation by exploring the use of the Book of Common Prayer in the plays. He opens his book with a delightful account of the Hampton Court Conference, in the early days of James's rule, where the leaders of the various theological parties gathered to debate the shape and contents of what would become the Jacobean prayer book. The King's Men, Shakespeare's theater company, were among the players invited to punctuate the debates with dramatic diversion. Swift's thesis is that Shakespeare was paying attention at Hampton Court. In fact, not just there, but throughout his career: the playwright catches hold of the prayer book's language, especially the controversial parts, and works them into the speeches and images of his dramas. This is something of an obsession, Swift says, that builds through the 1590s, culminates in the heavily liturgical *Macbeth* (1605?), and then suddenly is over. In careful readings of several plots, he makes his case that the narrative structure is deeply informed by baptism, Eucharist, and especially the marriage and burial offices.

Swift's historical work is impressive and engaging. On the confessional question he offers the welcome reminder that there was a wide spectrum of practices and convictions that the division of Anglican/Puritan/Roman Catholic does not come close to naming. He explores the marginalia in privately owned prayer books, and finds one in which the devotee revised his Protestant Edwardian book to reflect the complete overhaul of the liturgy introduced by Mary: evidence, Swift says, that laity saw doctrinal and liturgical revision as a living conversation, whatever the bishops and heads of state thought.

There are some theological blind spots that will be obvious to Anglican readers, such as his unsupported (insupportable?) assertion that baptism is "the only Anglican sacrament to promise transformation" (p. 244), or his identification of the Book of Homilies as "set prayers and devotions for the English Church" (p. 34) rather than, simply, homilies.

As with many authors who attempt to illuminate a previously shadowed source, Swift on occasion overdoes his case. His insistence is now and then more impassioned than persuasive, as in his pointing out the "obvious" echo of Psalm 128's "Blessed are they that fear the Lord, and walk in his ways," included in the marriage ceremony, in Macbeth's plea to the earth to "hear not my steps, which way they walk" (pp. 54-59). The risk here is not so much hyperbole as it is missing the point: all the energy that goes into making the case for influence, persuasively or not, can make it seem as if Shakespeare wrote a play *about* the prayer book, rather than about, say, the viral power of suggestion. Here Shell's "high doctrine of the audience" would help.

Where Swift finds a metanarrative arc of liturgical obsession in Shakespeare's career, Piero Boitani's *Gospel according to Shakespeare* sees the development of a "Gospel founded on immanence" (p. 8), an experiment with human life and pain that blossoms in the late romances as a kind of realized eschatology. So if

Hamlet and Lear leave us wondering if there is, actually, any special providence in the fall of a sparrow, the last plays (*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Tempest*) show us what form such a providence might take.

Boitani has a keen eye for theology, and once he points it out only the stubbornest of secularists could miss it. Lear's Cordelia is the child who "is about my father's business." If that play charts the devastation brought on by the father's failure to recognize this simple truth, the romances turn that failure toward dramatic recognitions between fathers and daughters, lovers, husbands and wives, brothers. It may take resurrection to get there; art and creativity on the part of the heroes and heroines can work miracles. In Boitani's words: "Where beauty reaches, there lie redemption and salvation" (p. 119).

Writing for a popular audience, the author helpfully lays out the plot lines for the plays he discusses. Like Swift, his readings of the plays are on occasion affected by a need to make it all fit (Lear is both Job and Christ, Prospero's renouncing of magic is a Pauline *kenosis*). My chief complaint about this very good book, in fact, is that it makes theology a little too easy. These are complex plays, and some of them read better on Good Friday than they do on Easter morning. If tragedy is *only* a bridge to comedy, then we may miss some of the subtle hopefulness of the tragic and darker traces in the comedic.

Sarah Beckwith's *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* is the most theologically rich of this batch of critical texts, and perhaps of any written in recent years. Influenced by philosopher Stanley Cavell's reading of the tragedies as failures of acknowledgment, she extends his argument by reading on to the romances. She travels the same literary territory as Boitani, but sees a different story taking shape there. The Reformation, she tells us, began as a debate about penance: how to ask for, receive, and offer absolution from sins. This is the theological context for Shakespeare's works. In the absence of a liturgical rite, "Shakespeare's theater is a search for community" that can embody the work of penance (pp. 4-5).

"The body of Christ [is] liturgically enacted and not institutionally guaranteed" (p. 134), she says, in a particularly fine reading of *The Winter's Tale*. The plays bring grace into the risky relay of human interaction, and hint that people must learn to pardon one another, or else live with a mutually reinforced damnation. No

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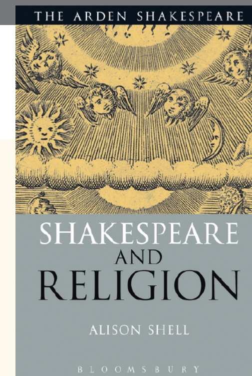
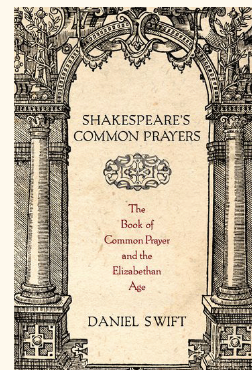
Shakespeare and Religion

By **Alison Shell**.
The Arden Shakespeare.
Pp. 320. $29.95



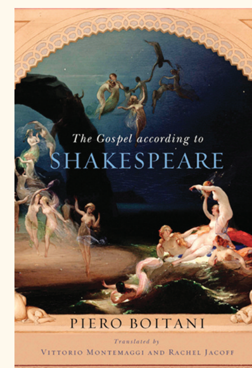
Shakespeare's Common Prayers

The Book of Common Prayer and the Elizabethan Age
By **Daniel Swift**. Oxford.
Pp. 304. $27.95



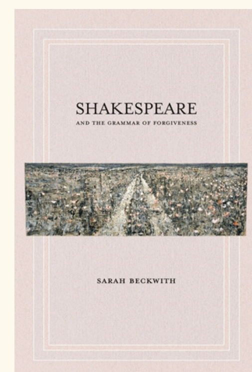
The Gospel According to Shakespeare

By **Piero Boitani**.
Translated by **Vittorio Montemaggi** and **Rachel Jacoff**.
Notre Dame. Pp. 168. $27



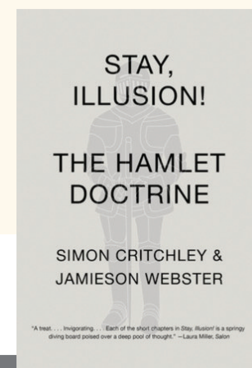
Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness

By **Sarah Beckwith**.
Cornell. Pp. 232. $24.95



Stay, Illusion!

The Hamlet Doctrine
By **Simon Critchley** and **Jamieson Webster**.
Pantheon. Pp. 288. $15.95



The body of Christ is liturgically enacted and not institutionally guaranteed.

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God is coming on chains from the top of the theater to override creaturely obstinance, *Cymbeline*'s half-comic Jupiter notwithstanding. Shakespeare thus performs a kind of sustained theological appeal for a humanly mediated grace, according to Beckwith. If the hyper-Protestants are correct (and her reading of the Reformers could do with some nuance here) and any human agency at all is a threat to our justification by faith, then we're up a creek, soteriologically speaking.

If she is not terribly interested in the debate about where Shakespeare took Holy Communion, she still is convinced that he named something that went missing when England stripped her altars. This is where Beckwith's theological argument becomes slightly murky. Is she saying, as mostly she seems to be, that the loss of an institutionally secure rite of penance is what drives Shakespeare to go looking for inter-human possibilities for the mediation of divine grace? Or is she saying, as occasional forays into the normative imply, that grace simply *is* mediated through human agency? If the former, then the playwright is longing for the security of Rome; if the latter, then he takes the Reformation as a *felix culpa* that, in spite of itself, forces us to see humanly crafted divine forgiveness staring in our faces, like the snake that nearly bit us.

The Hamlet Doctrine begins with the insistence that we will not be able to read Shakespeare well until we stop reading him as a Roman Catholic — or, by implied extension, as an Anglican, Puritan, or Christian of any stripe. Critchley and Webster, a philosopher and a psychologist respectively and a married couple, take *Hamlet* as a landscape for a series of interpretive meanderings. They take their title from a passage in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, though oddly cited so deeply into the book that it feels as if they are reluctant to give him credit: "Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion — that is the Hamlet Doctrine" (p. 195). Hamlet is indecisive about even his own existence, and this is because he knows too much. His discovery that "the play's the thing" is the discovery that veils of illusion create avenues for generative action.

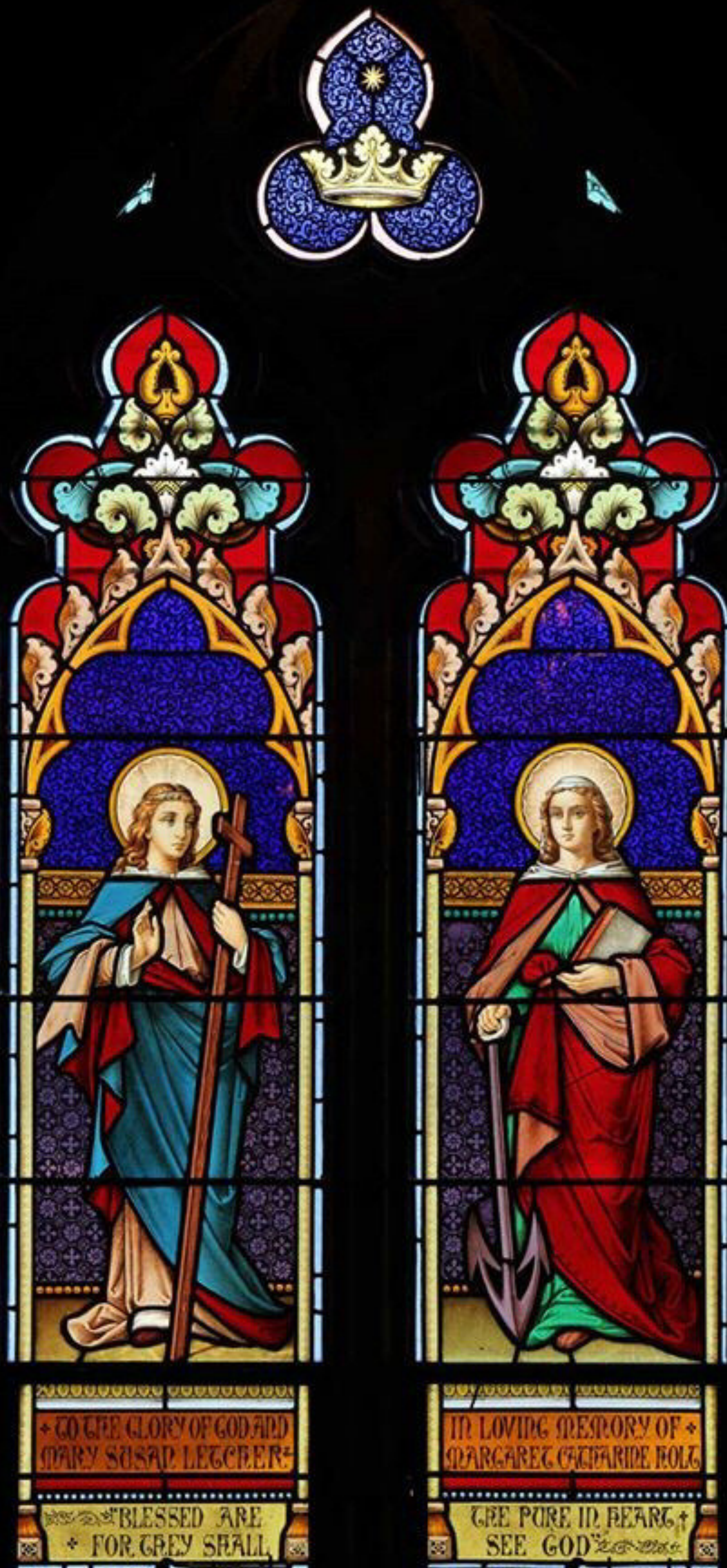
These authors would be unhappy with the shared view of Boitani and Beckwith that Hamlet opens an arc that closes with the resurrections and reconciliations of later plays. This is not to say that they prescribe a bleak nihilism, however. For them *Hamlet* is the tragedy of a failure to love, and the introspective soliloquies show us what happens to a man who suspects that he can no longer love. As Freud put it (and he was nearly as obsessed with Prince Hamlet as with King Oedipus): "A man who doubts his own love may, or rather must, doubt every lesser thing" (p. 23). Read this play as a coded account of purgatory, or a parentheses of suffering that is redeemed in the later work, and we miss the tragedy that is Hamlet. Love involves taking the sort of radical risks that the prince finds himself unable to take.

The chief difficulty of this book is that its trendiness gives it a lack of focus. Hegel pondered Hamlet in his aesthetic theory. Freud and Jung quoted Hamlet to each other as their collegiality dissolved. Political philosophers Benjamin and Schmitt both have readings of Hamlet. And our authors engage every one of these readings. Derrida wrote about Hamlet as well, and one has the impression that if his name weren't now passé in the academy, he would have earned a chapter as well. Moving from chapter to chapter can feel a bit like following a child with an attention deficit around a glitter factory. This is disappointing, because the authors raise hugely important theological and philosophical questions about love, truth, language. Why does action need disguise? Is it because the truth is ultimately too terrible to encounter directly, or perhaps because (as Beckwith would want to say) humans encounter eternal things humanly? Is love a kind of disguise? Or perhaps a faithful response to something transcendent? If so, what?

These five books are just a piece of the growing conversation about Shakespeare and theology. Together they suggest something very hopeful: that the generative power of his plays is enough to get philosophers and theologians and literary critics talking to each other. And this is important, because we risk missing the most surprising edges of what Shakespeare still wants to teach us about love, acknowledgment, death, grace, and pleasure if that conversation does not take place.

I conclude sermonically, with an invocation: go and gather a collection of the unlike-minded and see a local production of a Shakespeare play. Then — and this is essential — stop by the pub on the way home. See if something surprising happens. If it doesn't, email me and I'll pick up the bill.

Anthony D. Baker is Clinton S. Quin Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Seminary of the Southwest.



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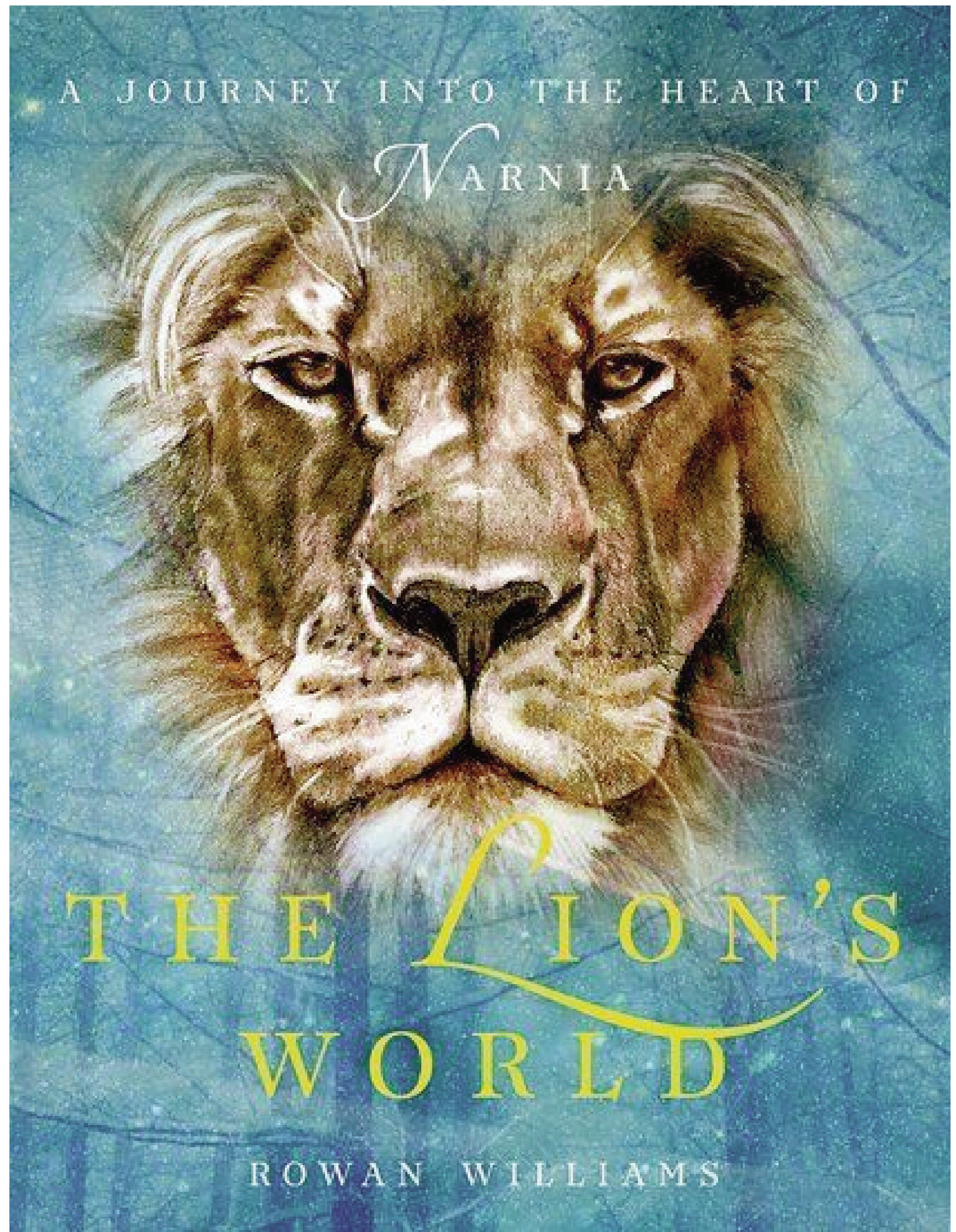


The Lion's World
A Journey into the Heart of Narnia
By **Rowan Williams**.
Oxford. Pp. 168. $16.95

Review by Andrew Petiprin

C.S. Lewis is the most popular and, to many of us, the greatest Christian apologist. His genius lies not just in sound arguments that he bequeathed to the likes of Tim Keller, nor in the winsomeness he shared with G.K. Chesterton. As *The Great Divorce, The Screwtape Letters,* and most notably the Chronicles of Narnia make clear, Lewis had a special gift for tapping the deep well of Christian truth via the literary imagination. As Alister McGrath notes in his masterful recent biography of Lewis, "he realised how fiction might allow the intellectual and imaginative appeal of worldviews to be explored" (p. 233).

Into this context steps Rowan Williams, reflecting on Lewis and Narnia in a series of public lectures subsequently collected as *The Lion's World*. Williams demonstrates that the enduring theological value of the books — now Hollywood films — rests upon an extraordinary artistic platform that Lewis was uniquely equipped to build. "He is not *just* trying to 'translate' Christian doctrine," Williams argues; "he is trying to evoke what it feels like to believe in the God of Christian revelation" (p. 27). To this end, few characters in English literature better convey the evident glory of the gospel than the lion Aslan, who is anything but a facile allegorical replacement for Jesus of Nazareth. "The point of Narnia," Williams says, "is to help us rinse out what is stale in our thinking about Christianity — which is almost everything" (p. 28).

Williams also deftly defends Narnia against its critics. He navigates carefully through ethical questions that, to Philip Pullman and others, leave Narnia stuck as a relic of mid-20th-century values. Williams concedes that Lewis was a man not only of his time but probably a bit before it. To snipe at his books through the scope of anti-Orientalism or feminism, however, misses the way in which an imagined world subverts all the systems and values of this world. Lewis's old-fashioned values serve, in fact, to create a timeless bond with the reader akin to "the sense of collusion between author and young reader at the expense of the adult world" (p. 35). Any genuinely objectionable content is thus important but secondary to the prospect of a literary place that invites us to imagine a gospel-centered version of our own. For example, Susan, the oldest Pevensie daughter who cannot return to Narnia, is not flawed because she becomes a modern woman; rather she "is guilty of what Edmund in *The Lion* is initially guilty of, no more and no less, which is the refusal to admit the reality of Narnia when you have actually lived there" (p. 41).

What is at stake for Lewis is the risk of losing ourselves completely to phony reasonableness. We need worlds like Narnia and saviors like Aslan to avoid complete self-delusion about the realness, for lack of a better term, of our reality. "Do not marvel," Jesus says to Nicodemus, that "you must be born again" (John 3:7). Williams echoes: "If the price of some kinds of even well-attested 'truth' is the abolition of some dimensions of human imagining, it is too high" (p. 61). We find a fantasy world on both sides of the wardrobe. Fiction is no less outside a book than inside it. Thus when we enter Lewis's Narnia, we encounter not a childish mapping out of

What is at stake for Lewis is the risk of losing ourselves completely to phony reasonableness.

a passé Christianity, but the childlike wonder necessary to perceive the kingdom that has come near. Williams praises Lewis effusively for such a life-giving vision. "In a word," Williams concludes, "what Lewis portrays with such power and freshness in Narnia is simply *grace*: the unplanned and uncontrolled incursion into our self-preoccupied lives of God's joy in himself" (p. 142).

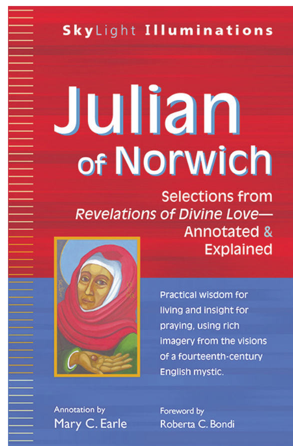
This is a beautiful book. Williams uses the opportunity of reflecting on Narnia to offer his own striking turns of phrase that inspire a deep longing for the saving grace that Lewis's books portray:

> Neither self-analysis nor the hope of seeing your face perfectly and justly reflected in the eyes of a human other will deliver you from the ever-present attraction of fiction over reality. And this leads by implication into what is almost a kind of moral argument for the existence of God. There is only one means of deliverance and it is confrontation with the truth in the form of a living person who has no distorting lens of self-interest in their vision for you. (p. 107)

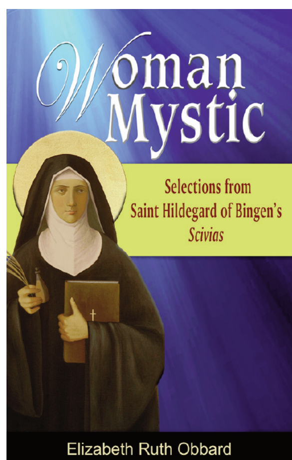
In Narnia, this person is Aslan, who tells Jill in *The Silver Chair* that "there is no other stream." Mr. Beaver reminds us in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* that Aslan is not "a tame lion," and to Williams he evokes the one in whose "eyes you can indeed see yourself reflected perfectly and justly" (p. 107). This is the Aslan who compels us to discover him by another name in our world. Read this book, and dust off the Chronicles, too.

The Rev. Andrew Petiprin is rector of St. Mary of the Angels Church in Orlando, Florida.

Mystical Tradition



Julian of Norwich
Selections from *Revelations of Divine Love*—Annotated and Explained
Annotation by **Mary C. Earle**.
Skylight Paths Publishing.
Pp. 224. $16.99



Woman Mystic
Selections from Saint Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*
By **Elizabeth Ruth Obbard**.
New City Press. Pp. 72. $9.95

Modern English translations of medieval texts are always a welcome sight, particularly when they open to the modern reader such rich religious imaginations as Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich. Within medieval studies, scholarship on both Hildegard and Julian in recent years has grown to be nearly overwhelming, but neither is as well known within the Church as she deserves to be. The work of Mary C. Earle and Elizabeth Ruth Obbard bridges the existing gap and makes these women accessible to anyone interested in the Christian mystical tradition.

Hildegard, the "Sibyl of the Rhine," was a 12th-century abbess, poet, physician, and traveling preacher, thought by some to be the first composer in the modern sense of the term. We know almost nothing of the 14th-century recluse known as Julian — even her name may be taken from a local church in Norwich, England — beyond what she chooses to say in the *Revelations of Divine Love*.

Both women demonstrate thorough awareness of their contemporary religious environment: Hildegard of the complex interchange between the world of the cloister and that of the nascent universities, Julian of the burgeoning popular interest in Middle English religious literature in a lively port city with international contacts. Both are highly intelligent voices steeped in and responding to the Christian contemplative tradition.

As a consequence, both Earle and Obbard have had to simplify in these works, arranging thematic extracts from Hildegard's and Julian's writings. Earle accompanies these extracts from Julian's *Revelations* with facing-page annotations. Earle is an excellent guide for general readers, pastoral and neither intrusive nor too jarringly "presentist" in her commentary.

Hildegard suffers more from this treatment: Obbard's book is not long enough to do full justice to the complex symbolic universe that is Hildegard's work, and of the two figures Hildegard is less immediately approachable. Unlike Julian, who embraces her experience of motherhood and speaks eloquently of the motherhood of God and Christ, Hildegard's visionary gift has a tendency to eclipse her sex.

As Obbard notes, she does not seem particularly drawn to "feminine" language applied either to God or, indeed, herself; *Woman Mystic* is an ironic title in this case. Moreover, Julian's visions are meant to communicate to her fellow believers the grounding of all their souls in the love of Christ. Hildegard's visions are more cosmic and less personal.

In all events, through these introductory works both voices may find a wider audience within the Church.

Hannah Matis Perett
Alexandria, Virginia

MTD for a New Generation

Children's Bibles needn't reduce faith to pabulum.

Review by Jon and Hollie Adamson

One of the small, daily joys of Christian parents is to present the gospel to their children in storytelling. It is a precious ritual of word and deed, since storytelling to children often has active, multisensory components. The words on the page, the images that surround them, the nearness of the bodies of the reader and the children, and the cues of light at various times in the day all make for a profound experience. With this in mind, choosing quality Bible stories is a fitting task for parents to take on, so that there is harmony between what children experience at home and at church as they are being built into the image of Jesus Christ.

Given all of this formative richness, it is regrettable that some publishers take unnecessary liberties when developing the texts of their children's Bibles. Take, for example, the *Candle Bible for Kids: Board Book*, which leaves out key Christian concepts or soft-pedals them. There is no mention of the Fall, it is unclear why the Flood comes, and Mary is given a "special baby" with no mention of his being God's Son. Most egregious of all is its handling of the Passion. Immediately after the Triumphal Entry, it moves abruptly: "But bad men left Jesus to die on a wooden cross." It is as if the editors believe that children can only handle a nice/mean dichotomy or that children have never worshiped in a space with a crucifix or window depicting the fullness of the faith.

The *Candle Bible for Kids: Toddler Edition* continues in this vein. It adds a number of stories typical to a children's Bible (Jericho, Elijah and the ravens, and Jonah) and some that are atypical (the calling of Matthew). Yet one of the central lessons of the Jonah story is left out. Jonah is merely "running away." There is no mention of Nineveh, repentance, or God's mercy. Once again, Jesus is not presented as God's Son at the Annunciation. One can only infer that basic identity in the Ascension story. Children are capable of robust

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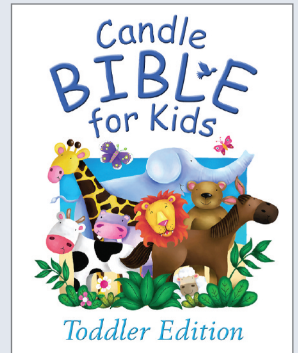
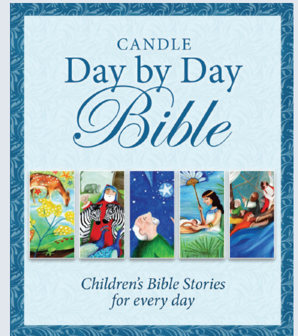
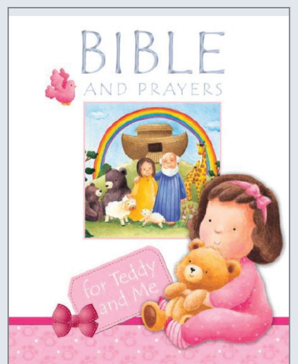
Candle Bible for Kids: Board Book
By **Juliet David**.
Illustrated by **Jo Parry**.
Candle Books. Pp. 42. $9.99



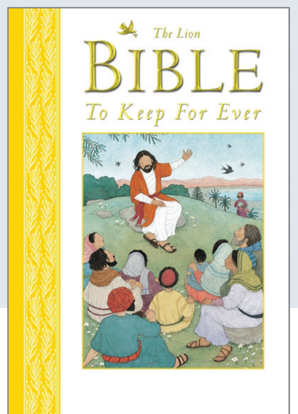
Candle Bible for Kids: Toddler Edition
By **Juliet David**.
Illustrated by **Jo Parry**.
Candle Books. Pp. 160. $9.99



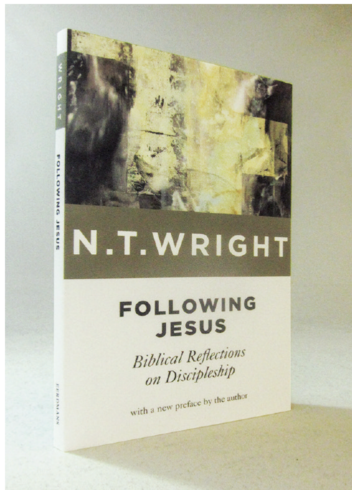
Candle Day by Day Bible
By **Juliet David**.
Illustrated by **Jane Heyes**.
Candle Books. Pp. 400. $16.99



Bible and Prayers for Teddy and Me
Adapted by **Christina Goodings**.
Illustrated by **Janet Samuel**.
Lion Children's. Pp. 64. $12.99



The Lion Bible to Keep For Ever
By **Lois Rock**.
Illustrated by **Sophie Allsopp**.
Lion Children's. Pp. 320. $17.99



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MTD for a New Generation

(Continued from previous page)

Christology. It is a shame to see Jesus primarily presented as a nice guy.

Elementary-age children are the target audience for the *Candle Day by Day Bible*. It offers 365 readings that are simple retellings of Bible stories. A sidebar on each page gives a short Bible verse or discussion question. There is a better sense of basic Christian faith, but it is presented unevenly. Some stories are included that do not typically make it into children's Bibles, like Hagar and Ishmael, David and Mephibosheth, or Peter and Cornelius. But this is muted by bizarre liberties taken with the text, like Adam and Eve naming the animals together, Jesus only imagining the Temptations in the Desert, or Mary having no role in the Wedding at Cana. Once again, there is almost no mention of Jesus' identity as God's Son, though it does appear in one of the sidebar comments ("The Son of God was born in a borrowed stable") and in the Centurion's identification at the Cross. The lack of even a single story from Revelation gives this 365-day book an incomplete feeling.

Bible and Prayers for Teddy and Me is an improvement compared to the Candle Bible series. The Jonah story is handled more completely. It includes the traditional wording of the Our Father. The Parable of the Sower is a welcome inclusion. Also, the Prodigal Son actually shows contrition in this retelling. A short poem-prayer appears after each story. Short and rhyming, each prayer reinforces the story and presents opportunities for applying the story's lesson. Sadly, both Creation and Christology are short-changed. There is no mention of the Fall and Jesus is not presented explicitly as God's Son, which spoils an otherwise worthy book.

The Lion Bible to Keep For Ever is the best of the lot. It starts off strong with a poetic retelling of Genesis that captures the parallelism of the days of creation. This signals the book's better grasp of both the spirit and the letter of the Scriptures. The Noah story includes one detail that children's Bibles typically leave out: seven pairs were kept of certain animal species (a welcome departure from the typically cartoonish two-by-two approach). The Hebrew midwives in Exodus are singled out for their valor. The prophet Amos has a story dedicated to him. The Annunciation is fully told. The book is visually rich, with two-page images periodically spaced throughout and smaller illustrations on single pages. It does not end with Revelation, but it reaches Paul's teaching that just as Jesus has been raised we will be raised and that one day Jesus will return.

> Children can do better if parents are diligent in their vocation.

Jesus asked: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" According to several of these books, he will find Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Children can do better if parents are diligent in their vocation.

Jon and Hollie Adamson are the parents of two young boys and live in Niles, Michigan.

Twin Themes

Like fires, ideas come about by rubbing two things together. Scott Sundquist's *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* brings a standard contemporary account of missiology (the study of Christian mission) into contact with a *gestalt* of themes associated with Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The flint here includes a cosmic scope to salvation history, liturgical emphasis on doxology, witness of the martyrs, and the kind of eschatological vista, à la Revelation 7, that one might find in a writer like Alexander Schmemann.

The book is organized in relation to these themes, around the twin poles of suffering and glory. Along the way the treatment of questions like salvation is influenced, perhaps more subtly, by traditional approaches like the harrowing of hell or the human being as microcosm. How many Protestant missiologists reach repeatedly for Ephrem the Syrian to illustrate the spirituality of mission, or speak of mission's end as glory in its "Eucharistic splendor" (p. 205)?

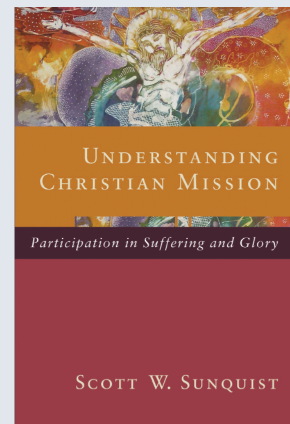
The book aims to be a comprehensive introduction to the study of mission, and as such moves through the usual sections of historical survey, biblical foundation, and contemporary and more practical topics such as holism and urbanization. The similarity to David Bosch's magisterial *Transforming Mission* is demonstrable. The concept of the *missio Dei* has become standard in missiological treatments, and so guides the treatment throughout.

In this regard, I appreciated Sundquist's awareness of how the concept has been misused in the recent history of missiology. He stresses that the reality of human sinfulness should not be obscured in *missio*'s shadow, and that the persons of the Trinity always work in concert throughout salvation history. He wisely roots suffering and glory in the cross itself.

Unlike comparable introductions, Sundquist's gives more space to pneumatology, not least because of the dramatic Pentecostal dimension to modern mission. He deals with the central questions of culture and other religions under the rubric of the Holy Spirit. With respect to the former he cites Pope Gregory's famous advice (in Bede) to missionaries among the Saxons to destroy the idols and redeploy the temples; he leaves the relation of continuity and discontinuity there.

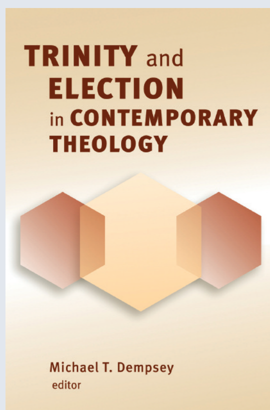
The original motive for the *missio* was to shift the focus from us to God, and in so doing to fix our eyes on the final horizon in a hopeful way. The move sometimes lost its way in the intricacies of trinitarianism and our own desires. The same good purposes are served by organizing missiological reflection around glory, and so the theme proves in Sundquist's book to be an apt and helpful framework to present this inherently multi-disciplinary pursuit.

The Very Rev. George R. Sumner
Toronto

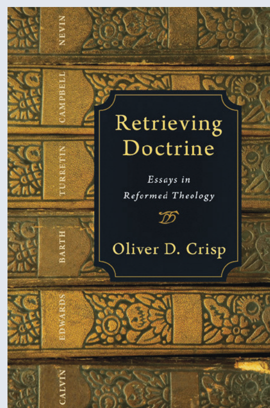


Understanding Christian Mission
Participation in Suffering and Glory
By **Scott W. Sundquist**.
Baker Academic. Pp. 464. $34.99

Clashing Calvinists



Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology
Edited by **Michael T. Dempsey.**
Eerdmans. Pp. 311. $38



Retrieving Doctrine
Essays in Reformed Theology
By **Oliver D. Crisp.**
IVP Academic. Pp. 223. $22

Review by Scott Jackson

The Church, the Protestant Reformers held, is *semper reformanda* — "always to be reformed." But to what extent should this apply to the task of reformulating doctrine? Theologian Bruce L. McCormack has sparked debate with his call to revise our understanding of the Trinity in light of Karl Barth's Christ-centered account of election. The essays in Michael Dempsey's volume explore this debate and its implications.

Barth offered a radical revision of election theology in which Jesus Christ, the electing God made man, becomes the final word on God's will and acts. Barth discarded the notion of some hidden, absolute decree of predestination and wove his views on election into his doctrine of God. If the covenant of grace frames our view of the Godhead, then the pre-incarnate Son of God (the *logos asarkos*) is always oriented to his vocation as the Word made flesh (the *logos incarnandus*). Barth thereby qualifies the distinction between God's inner being (immanent Trinity) and God's works of creation and salvation (economic Trinity).

McCormack seeks to work out these claims to their logical conclusion, even if that means going beyond what Barth argued. He asserts that we must seek "God where he may be found" — in Christ alone: because to look for a God "behind" the decree of election is to engage in fruitless metaphysical speculation. Further, he claims, not only is election primary for God's salvific economy, but this primal decision *constitutes* the inner relationships of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. McCormack's views have elicited sharp critiques from some other Barthians, who worry that such "revisionism" vitiates divine freedom and that, if election precedes Trinity ontologically, the creation becomes necessary for God's very identity. Paul Molnar and George Hunsinger, major voices in this debate who contributed to this volume, marshal dozens of passages to prove that Barth always held the Trinity to be the basis of election and not vice versa.

Other essays in this volume nuance the key issues and set the debate in a broader context of constructive theology and ethics. For example, Paul Nimmo extends the discussion of election into pneumatology, construing the Spirit as eternally oriented to the community of faith. Moreover, Roman Catholic theologian Matthew Levering sets McCormack's views in critical conversation with the classical theism of Thomas Aquinas, who argued for a profound unity between God's inner-trinitarian processions and divine works in creation and providence.

The essays by Oliver Crisp, a professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, present a more conservative approach to retooling theology. He seeks to retrieve older voices for Christian thought today. Thus, for example, he articulates and defends Calvin's doctrine of providence against contemporary critics. Crisp also explores more neglected figures — such as the scholastic Francis Turretin and the Scottish Presbyterian John McLeod Campbell — in closely argued essays on Christology, original sin, and atonement.

Crisp sympathetically interprets the largely forgotten work of John Williamson Nevin, the 19th-century Mercersberg theologian who riled many of his Reformed contemporaries with his "high church" take on Calvinism. Confessionally Reformed yet influenced by the Romantics, Nevin affirms Christ's real if non-corporeal presence in the Eucharist. His rich account of the Church as an organic whole united mystically to Jesus Christ is an untapped resource for ecclesiology today, Crisp suggests.

Crisp also culls insights from the trenchant controversy among 18th-century New England Congregationalists about whether a church member could be admitted to Communion without an explicit profession of faith. Northampton's Jonathan Edwards came to reject the practice of his grandfather and predecessor, Solomon Stoddard, who had held that Communion could be a "converting sacrament" for congregants in good standing who could give a general affirmation of Church authority.

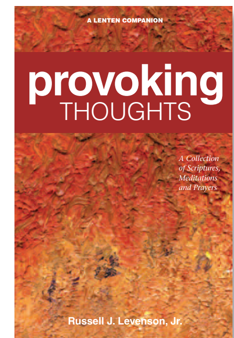
Edwards, in contrast, insisted that partakers in the Lord's table be able to make a personal, explicit profession of faith. Crisp notes that Edwards "thinks the biblical position is that the 'people of Christ' should make heartfelt profession of their faith; should have an understanding of what this means; and should express this in right theological and moral judgments, living consistently with such judgments" (p. 191). This strict view likely cost Edwards his pastorate. In Crisp's sympathetic reading, though, Edwards was not a Christian perfectionist, but rather sought to uphold the integrity of the faith signified by the supper and, thus, to affirm the Church's character as the elect bride of Christ.

Other essays illustrate some of the limitations of Crisp's conservative Reformed perspective for contemporary theology. Readers who reject claims that atonement is limited and that divine justice is retributive likely will find Crisp's essays on salvation problematic. In an essay on Barth, Crisp argues that the Swiss theologian's denial of universalism was inconsistent with the thrust of his views on election and reconciliation. Still, this essay does little to advance the discussion beyond critiques that have been pressed against Barth for decades. Barth, it seems, was willing to accept a theology that cannot be easily reduced to analytic logic: a theology that seeks to remain faithful to a mysterious and living God who always transcends the limits of human thought.

J. Scott Jackson is a writer and independent scholar in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Provoking Thoughts

Russell J. Levenson, Jr.



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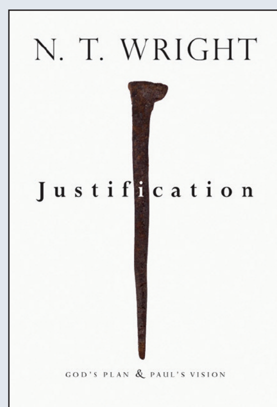
N.T. Wright Tackles John Piper



Justification

God's Plan
and Paul's Vision
By **N.T. Wright**.
IVP Academic. Pp. 279. $25

Review by Matthew A. Gunter

For too long we have read Scripture with 19th-century eyes and 16th-century questions. It's time to get back to reading with first-century eyes and 21st-century questions. So says N.T. Wright in his introduction (p. 37).

Wright is convinced that we have been asking the Scriptures, particularly the Pauline corpus, some wrong questions and are thus stuck with some wrong answers. In many ways, Wright's book is about getting the questions right — which, among other things, means getting clear just what questions are being asked and answered in particular biblical passages. "Scripture," he writes, "does not exist to give authoritative answers to questions other than those it addresses" (p. 40).

In particular, this book engages what he understands to be mistaken questions and answers from certain elements of the Reformed tradition. It is, in fact, an *apologetical* (and at times polemical) response to challenges from Reformed representatives, most especially John Piper, to what Wright has written before.

Wright argues that Piper and much of the tradition he represents have simply not paid careful enough attention to what Paul actually wrote, let alone the questions that lay behind what he wrote. Some key elements of Paul's thinking that he thinks get short shrift are "Abraham and the promises God made to him, incorporation into Christ, resurrection and new creation, the coming together of Jews and Gentiles, eschatology in the sense of God's purpose-driven plan through history, and, not least, the Holy Spirit and the formation of Christian character" (p. 31). They have missed these elements because they have supposed Paul to be answering the questions they have inherited from the Reformation; for instance: How does one find relief from the burden of guilt under the law and enter into God's grace? Wright points out that there was no apparent sense in first-century Judaism that the law was a burden, but rather it was understood to be a gift from God. Wright is convinced that Paul was addressing other questions, such as: How do the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus fit into God's continuing faithfulness to the promises he made to Abraham to bless all people and all creation through his seed?

Neglecting or marginalizing these ideas leads to a conception of justification that is too narrowly focused on the fate of the individual and who will go to heaven when they die. Is the whole of Christian truth all about me and my salvation? Wright sees this as the equivalent of supposing the sun goes round the earth. Instead, Wright argues, we should focus on the continuous narrative of God's redemption of the whole of creation beginning with the promises to Abraham, through the election of Israel and the covenant, "reaching its climax in Jesus the Messiah and subsequently developing in fresh ways which God the creator, the Lord of history, had always intended" (p. 34). In the latter approach, there is still

> “Scripture does not exist to give authoritative answers to questions other than those it addresses.”

“saving grace accomplishing redemption in the once-for-all death of the Messiah,” *and* there is the formation of the Church as “the proleptic unity of all mankind in Christ as the sign of God’s coming reign over the whole world” (p. 44). For Wright, one cannot talk about justification without talking about transformation and mission.

Wright lays out his case for this understanding in the first half of the book, marked especially by this provocative question: “Suppose we came to Ephesians first with Colossians close behind [and read] Romans and Galatians in light of them instead of the other way round?” (p. 43). In the second half of the book he offers a summary exegetical exploration of the Pauline letters. This latter half by itself is a wonderful resource.

As a response to critics, the book at times feels like listening in on one half of an argument. This might especially be the case for those unfamiliar with the Reformed voices. But that does not really get in the way of a fascinating exploration of some foundational questions about what Christians believe God is up to in redeeming all of creation, including human beings.

The Rt. Rev. Matthew A. Gunter is bishop of Fond du Lac.

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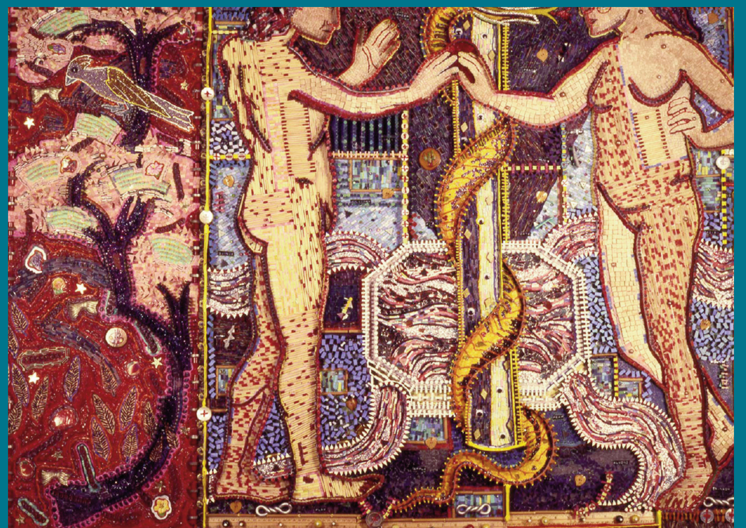
Ash Wednesday/Waller County
49 x 49 inches 1998, mixed media collage on paper

CULTURES

IMAGE

Lent

By Mary McCleary
www.marymccleary.com



Adam and Eve. 60 x 45 inches 1986, mixed media collage on paper

VERSE

By Aron Dunlap

El Ganso

Spain would be a wonderful place to die
Not in a hospital, or some ward
But playing cards in El Ganso.
The game would have to be bridge
(or whatever the Spaniards call it)
And I would be the fourth —
A dummy to the end of my days
I would play and play and play
And then simply start to fade.
The others, long accustomed and in mutual habit,
Would know my hand and my heart.
The rare child passing by
Would hear me humming
And start to sing.
Then one day a workman clad in blue
Repairing the bells at the top of the church
Would find me in a stork's nest
Down at the bottom
Nourished and full of flight

Rise to Walk

In this life we only wake to dream the further
With death — poor pilgrim! —
The only way to waking
And tears the womb's water
Weaving new clothes and new bones.
And when the trumpet blows
Our ships will halt
The sun will stir
And we will rise to walk

The School of Reconciliation

Does anyone really contest that the Archbishop of Canterbury is right to call for "mutual flourishing" in the Church, across well-worn divisions? As he told TLC at Trinity Wall Street, the Church of England has now adopted a set of "guiding principles … to help everyone remember where their unity lies," since even amid disagreement with one another, "we are all in Christ" (see p. 5 of this issue). And the theme is one he has spoken of often, sometimes in terms of "good disagreement," which he defines as discrete and respectful conversation, aimed at listening to and interpreting others "in light of their best intentions" (p. xiii in Phil Groves and Angharad Parry Jones, *Living Reconciliation*, published by the Anglican Consultative Council [SPCK, 2014]).

In any case, the answer to the initial question is *yes*. Mutual flourishing seems offensive and dangerous to us when it comes to all sorts of issues, both in churches and in civic settings. We are accustomed to our leaders calling for clarity of principle and for steadfast justice (mercy is out of fashion), on the basis of which we stand against error and defend the faith as we understand it.

Is this wrong? In defense of defending the faith, one thinks of Aquinas's confident account of how Christian theology should respond both to heretics and to those who "believe nothing of divine revelation." "Since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated," writes Thomas, "it is clear that the arguments brought against faith cannot be demonstrations, but are difficulties that can be answered" (*Summa theologiae* I 1, 8 c).

We do well, however, to consider the difference between false teaching *simpliciter* and what Paul calls the necessary divisions that emerge in local churches, through which we are tested and tried (1 Cor. 11:19). The former sort of error is easily answered, the Church has held, with reference to the deposit of the faith and its authoritative interpretation via councils and settled orthodoxy. The latter arguments amount to something more like the formative fire to which we are subjected, in order to "test what sort of work each has done" (1 Cor. 3:13). Here we touch something intrinsic to the life of the Church as rightly ordered and normatively understood, namely, that she is on the way, composed mostly of erstwhile infants just now fixing to get ready to digest some solid food (3:1-2); folks, as Paul makes clear, given to in-fighting until a minute ago, who need encouragement to let the arguments between Apollos and Cephas drop, urged on by Chloe's people and … yes, a rebuke or two from the apostle himself (3:5-6; 1:11ff.; cf. Galatians), to which a good soldier can only reply, "Thank you, Paul, may I have another?"

This is the school of reconciliation at the heart of the gospel, that is itself the Church: the forming of Christians by repentance and humility, through which our cheap facsimile of wisdom is shown to be a sham, and so may be replaced by an altogether more interesting, if surprising, curriculum, centered on "the word about the cross" (1 Cor. 1:18). Baptism serves as the letter of admission, initial orientation, and first semester of classes rolled into one, on the other side of which harrowing experience the faithful hope to see rapid growth in the good, fed by an edifying environment of encouragement and challenge, ordered by divine initiative (3:6-7).

Will defense of the faith show up here? Or training in justice? Yes, but only as ordered around a divine center, since God is the subject matter, and the community and its singular mind are formed *in* him. Accordingly, a particular character emerges.

First, as both Son of God and Word, Jesus Christ is all about encouraging creaturely discursiveness, so teaching takes a prime place. A healthy Church is a doctrinally engaged Church that seeks to ask and answer questions, ordered by reverent wonder. Debate is welcomed, as is correction, through which all may seek transformation by the renewing of their minds, so that they may "discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). In this way the faithful learn to renounce sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, and robbery, for instance (1 Cor. 5:11), every day if necessary (15:31), because these have no place in the household of faith and must be driven out. Ash Wednesday is tailored to the task: "Have mercy on us, Lord." And they find freedom by giving judgment its due, for "when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). Without such a formative in-

terchange, the gospel makes little sense, "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" but now are "justified by his grace as a gift" (Rom. 3:23-24).

Second, as is already clear, the language of this school takes a certain form, in service of holiness and unity. Good disagreement does not simply bless all difference and diversity but strives to resolve difficulties as they arise. And this is the historical pattern of Christian reconciliation: that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against then, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor. 5:19). In this way, Christian reconciliation takes the form of Christ's own sacrifice, which *effects* the life of grace and calls forth grateful imitation. This is clear in Ephesians, as the facing and overcoming of division constitutes the Church. For Jews and Gentiles are "made" one body in the flesh of Jesus, "reconciled … through the cross" (Eph. 2:14, 16). On the other side of such instruction, one cannot help but be changed. Virtue is the name of the game, reflected in the fruit of the Spirit, which provides a certain measure of progress.

Third, in good Augustinian fashion, the inscrutable mystery of God is reverently marked and honored. Commenting on the recent consecrations of Libby Lane and Philip North, a friend noted that many modern churches now distinguish between sacramental validity and efficacy. Validity, however critical, does not strictly condition efficacy. And the point holds true in the most hierarchical and orderly of Christian churches. Writing to his friend and former colleague, the Lutheran Bishop Johannes Hanselmann of Bavaria, then-Cardinal Ratzinger remarked in 1993 that ecumenical conversations have importantly yielded "the realization that the question of the Eucharist cannot be restricted to the problem of 'validity.' Even a theology along the lines of the concept of succession, as is in force in the Catholic and in the Orthodox Church, should in no way deny the saving presence of the Lord in the Evangelical [Lutheran] Lord's Supper" (Benedict XVI, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, p. 248).

Surprising, perhaps. But less so as we grow accustomed to serving the Lord of the Church on our knees, in the hope that prayer will inculcate a proper reserve. Classically, for Augustine or Aquinas, validity also fails to *guarantee* efficacy, *pace* the Donatists. As Aquinas says, the sacrament itself is not the same as its reality (ST III 66, 1; 64, 9). Thus, Augustine also made room for reception of grace *by desire*, short of sacramental communication (68, 2). And, Thomas notes, Christ did not confine his power to the sacraments, even as they remain the ordinary means of salvation and in that sense necessary for the faithful (67, 5; cf. 65, 4).

Facing divisions in the body of Christ — including Anglican divisions, and the dioceses and parishes of one and another contending church — the school of reconciliation would teach the faithful to speak as sinners, who admit that "often enough, people of both sides were to blame" (*Decree on Ecumenism*, para. 3). And having confessed, they

Virtue is the name of the game, reflected in the fruit of the Spirit, which provides a certain measure of progress.

may marvel that, by grace, the Lord welcomes all who show up as servants of the Servant (1 Cor. 3:5). In such a school, Christian argument is necessarily transformed by love — by which everyone, including the faithful themselves, know that they are his (John 13:34-35).

In Lent especially, the school of reconciliation beckons. Our Lord sets the curriculum. And, after writing the book, he serves as exemplary student and teacher. The common thread through it all is the Passion, and like all crosses this one can seem heavy. But that's the flesh talking. On the other side is new life in him.

See you in class.

Christopher Wells

'Allow Suffering to Speak'

(Continued from page 7)

their work undervalued and unfairly compensated, she said.

This solidarity "might be an alternative to, or maybe a stronger version of, Christian compassion," Ehrenreich said. "Solidarity says we are all in this together."

But she said that *all* does not include those who cling to power and vie to keep others living in poverty. From them, she said, the rest "have a responsibility to take power." Ethicist Traci West, author of *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*, made a similar point.

"No one with power and status gives it away," she said. "Remember the ways in which we have to seize that power." The crowd cheered. She explained further.

"It is only through poor people's movements for social change," she said, "and seizing power that honors their dignity, their human dignity, the thriving that they are entitled to. It seizes power from those who would want, and who would do everything that they possibly can, to ensure that they are not given basic human rights and a basic opportunity to economically thrive." More applause followed.

But others said systemic inequality demands a different type of solidarity, one that spans class lines. It provides a personal hand up for those who are less well-off and need advantages passed down to them.

Reno observed that society's elites know how to read subtle social cues and speak about sensitive subjects in publicly acceptable ways. For them, this ability to navigate complexity is a natural result of their educations and social ties, and it helps them maintain status.

Middle-class and affluent people are not teaching these types of skills across class lines, he said. That's helping ensure that some never move up. It's a problem that cries out for a renewed sense of solidarity that recognizes "we're all in this together," and must share knowledge and skills across all class divides. He said elites are doing a disservice in our time by refusing to defend traditional moral norms, including family structures, among less affluent and less educated populations.

"Equality is a secondary value," he said. "The primary value is being responsible for each other."

Anglicans seem to be taking it all in and pondering their next steps. Many at the conference bristled at Reno's diagnoses and prescriptions. Reactions in tweets spoke of disbelief at some of his conclusions. They applauded and cheered when other panelists took issue with his points.

But Archbishop Welby appreciated Reno's concern for rehabilitating family structures. Family-strengthening ministries should be one of many fronts on which the Church works to undo systemic inequality and the structures that propagate it.

"In this country when you start talking about 'family values,' it has all kinds of political connotations," Welby said in an interview. "There's so much baggage. And this is a real pity because we do need to talk about family."

He said family should be understood not merely as nuclear units of parents and children. It should include extended families and a fostered, wider community.

"There is a need for the renewal of that sense of mutual commitment and love within households and families," he said. "But it's not just about the poor. It's about every level of society."

G. Jeffrey MacDonald

Community's Ecumenical Blessing

The Archbishop of Canterbury and ecumenical guests prayed for two community leaders at Lambeth Palace on January 28. Archbishop Welby licensed the Rev. Anders Litzell as prior of the Community of St. Anselm and Sister Sonia Béranger as its director of community in an ecumenical service. Members of the congregation laid hands on the new prior and director and prayed for them in English and French.

The Community of St. Anselm, which launches in September, is a radical new initiative by Welby. Young Christians from around the world are invited to spend "a year in God's time" at Lambeth Palace.

Litzell is an Anglican priest from Sweden who has experience in the Pentecostal and Lutheran traditions as well as three provinces of the Anglican Communion. While a student at Wheaton College, he attended St. Barnabas Church in the nearby suburb of Glen Ellyn. He was ordained in the Church of England, served a Lutheran parish in Sweden and directed Alpha's Sweden office. Later he moved to London to work with Alpha International. He will pioneer the community and direct its worship and work.

Sister Béranger is a senior member of the Chemin Neuf community with experience in the spiritual formation of young people across several continents. Most recently she led Chemin Neuf's community at Hautecombe Abbey in France. As well as being responsible for the abbey, which welcomes 100,000 visitors a year, she also ran a training program for young Christians from different nationalities and denominations.

"This is a moment of extraordinary adventure," Archbishop Welby said. "We don't know what the outcomes will be. It is a question for the Holy Spirit of God, and that's a very, very good place to be.

"Our hope and vision is that those young people who come here will be so changed by their encounter with Christ that in 20 or 30 years they will change the world."

Appointments

The Rev. **Maria Anderson** is mission developer for the Diocese of Maine and New England Synod of the ELCA, and pastor of St. Ansgar's Lutheran, Portland, ME.

The Rev. **John Hood Branson** is interim rector of Christ Church, 118 N Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314.

The Rev. **Rosa Brown** is priest-in-charge of St. Paul's, 451 Van Houten St., Paterson, NJ 07501.

The Rev. **Amy Crowe** is vicar of Holy Innocents, 561 Front St., Lahaina, HI 96761.

The Rev. **Jennifer Ann Coe Fulton** is priest-in-charge of St. John of the Cross, 601 E Vistula St., Bristol, IN 46507.

The Rev. **Elizabeth Hendrick** is rector of St. Matthew's, 1520 Oak Rd., Snellville, GA 30078.

The Rev. **Cynthia Hizer** is vicar of the Southeast Region of the Episcopal Church Area Mission in the Navajo Nation, 1257 Mission Ave., Farmington NM 87499 (Good Shepherd, Fort Defiance, AZ; St. Joseph's, Many Farms, AZ; and St. Mark's, Coalmine, NM).

The Rev. **Tom Malionek** is rector of St. Paul's, 6 Silvester St., PO Box 637, Kinderhook, NY 12106.

The Rev. **Nancy Moore** is rector of Christ Church, 35 Paris St., Norway, ME 04268, and pastor, Trinity Lutheran, South Paris, ME.

The Rev. **Mollie Roberts** is rector of St. Simon Peter Church, Pell City, AL 35125.

The Rev. **Julia Rusling** is associate at St. Patrick's, 4755 N Peachtree Rd., Dunwoody, GA 30338.

The Rev. **Lael Sorensen** is rector of St. Peter's, 11 White St., Rockland, ME 04841.

The Rev. **Keith Turbeville** is rector of Holy Trinity by the Lake, 1524 Smirl Dr., Rockwall, TX 75032.

Ordinations

Priests

Newark — The Rev. **Joyce McGirr**, associate, Atonement, 97 Highwood Ave., Tenafly, NJ 07670.

Virginia — **Judy Davis**, assistant, St. Andrew's, 240 S Laurel St., Richmond, VA 23220; **Andrew Guffey**, assistant, St. Alban's, 6800 Columbia Pike, Annandale, VA 22003; **Elizabeth Keeler**, assistant, Christ Church Georgetown, 31st and O Streets NW, Washington, DC 20007; **Eugene H. LeCouteur II**, associate, St. Stephen's, 6000 Grove Ave., Richmond, VA 23226; **G. Willis Logan**, Christ Church, 120 W. High St., Charlottesville, VA 22902; **E. Weston Mathews**, associate, St. Stephen's, 6000 Grove Ave., Richmond, VA 23226.

West Tennessee — **Hester Shipp Mathes**, curate, Holy Communion, 4645 Walnut Grove Rd., Memphis, TN 38117.

Western Michigan — **Christian John Baron**, curate, and **Jodi Lynn Baron**, curate, Grace Church, 555 Michigan Ave., Holland MI 49423.

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Atlanta — **Paul Kemper Anderson**, **Whitney Ann Burton**, **Nancee Ann Cekuta**, **Alan Blair Cowart**, **Bryan Thomas Hinson**, **Richmond Ansel Jones**, **Ashley Alexandra Gabriella Lytle**, **Andrew Austin McGehee**, **Richard Devon Sanders**, **William Smyth Stanley**, and **Bonnie Gordy Underwood**.

Georgia — **Burt Derrick**, Annunciation, 1512 Meadows Lane, Vidalia, GA 30474.

Newark — **Gerard Andrew Racioppi**.

Deaths

The Rev. **Gerald Gilmore**, a U.S. Navy veteran of World War II who devoted much of his life to advocacy for justice, died Dec. 20. He was 100.

Born in Wayland, MA, he was a graduate of Harvard University and Virginia Theological Seminary. He was ordained deacon and priest in 1948, and served churches in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Wisconsin.

During World War II, he taught communications at Columbia University and navigation at the University of Notre Dame. His concern for justice took him to Mississippi in the 1960s, Nicaragua in the 1980s, and South Africa in the 1990s.

Fr. Gilmore is survived by sons Jeremy, Peter, and Jonathan Gilmore; five grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

The Rev. **Robert Hamm Grindrod**, who served churches in Missouri and Pennsylvania, and was active in ministry among the deaf, died Dec. 26. He was 63.

Born in Hanover, PA, he was a graduate of Eastern Nazarene College, General Theological Seminary, and Eden Theological Seminary. He was ordained deacon and priest in 1977.

In addition to leading churches for the deaf, he was a sign-language interpreter for secondary schools, college, seminaries, and political leaders, including President George H.W. Bush.

He is survived by a fiancée, the Rev. Karen A. King; daughters Amy Grindrod-Sierra and Marcy Grindrod; a son, Liam McNamara; and an aunt, Julia Ann Hamm.

The Rev. **Kenneth Calvin Hedelson**, a U.S. Army veteran who helped liberate the Dachau concentration camp, died Dec. 6. He was 91.

A native of Burke, SD, who grew up during the Great Depression, Hedelson rode a pony named Joker to a one-room schoolhouse. During World War II he served in the 20th Armored Division from 1943 to 1946.

He was ordained deacon and priest in 1965 and served several congregations in Nebraska and Iowa. In his retirement he served parishes in Arizona. Fr. Hedelson played saxophone as a member of a dance band, the Aces of Rhythm. He was an announcer for Bridgeport (NE) High School's baseball team.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Lola. He is survived by sons R. Glen, Steven, and Thomas Hedelson; daughters Jan Kirch and Julie Hedelson; four grandchildren; three great-grandchildren; and a sister, Jean Hutchison.

St. Paul's Church in Nantucket www.stpaulschurchnantucket.org

Our church is located in the historic town of Nantucket on an island 30 miles off the coast of Massachusetts. Our heritage of whaling, of natural beauty, and our offshore location have attracted those whose souls have an affinity for the sea, for nature, and for self-reliance. We come from diverse economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds and include year-round islanders, summer residents, and visitors from around the world. Many of these return year after year and consider St. Paul's their spiritual home.

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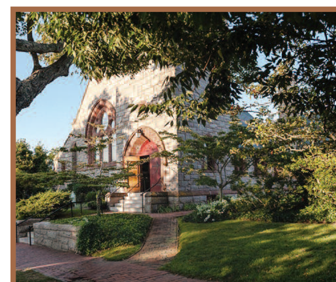
St. Paul's Search Committee
20 Fair St., Nantucket, MA 02554
Email: **pjgoddard13@gmail.com**



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Gen. 9:8-17 • Ps. 25:1-9 • 1 Pet. 3:18-33 • Mark 1:9-15

Two Floods

God speaks: "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11). Floods have yet come and bodies have been swept away, giant trees torn from the ground, cars lifted and buildings crushed. The waters that sometimes breach their limit are turbulent and formless, a void and darkness, a destroying death, but not a death to all flesh. Life is promised, but life in a world still hurt and broken. So the promise is renewed with signs, significations that God will remember the members of his body. "When the bow is in the cloud, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" (Gen. 9:16). Ultimately, God will preserve and love; yet death is.

The first flood is a type of the second flood, the font of all bleeding from the brow and hands and feet and side of the one Christ who suffered for sins once for all (1 Pet. 3:18). His blood runs from his body down the cross to the ground to cracks in the clay, down into the dark abyss of a molten and boiling hades. His blood "made a proclamation to the spirits in prison" (1 Pet. 3:19). His blood is All Love Excelling. It flows without destroying, gathering in its current what had been locked away in a dark prison-like abyss and lifting it to light and life. Here is a flood to welcome, a flood of love and life.

It is a cleansing, but not of the body. Rather, caught up in the flood of Christ's love, all those lost in darkness and death,— all of us — make "an appeal to God for a good conscience" because without Christ we do not and will never have one (1 Pet. 3:21). "Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God" we claim a new conscience because we are claimed by the life that is his. The current of a bloody love that went down to hades has swelled to heights above angels and authorities and powers (1 Pet. 3:22). He took hell to heaven, broke the grates, and set the captives free in the freedom of his forever love.

Indeed, we may go with Christ to the third heaven, but going with him up will at the same time mean going with him down. He did not account equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself. We return our infirmities. We are new in a renewal not yet complete. The word is sure and to be trusted by all those bathed in the blood of Christ. "You are my son, you are my daughter, you are my beloved, you are the one in whom I am pleased, for I have hidden you in my bosom where my Son is" (Mark 1:11, expanded by grace and adoption).

Tough love for the beloved of God: "Immediately the Spirit drove them into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12). And there were devils and wild beasts, deadly drinks and hissing serpents, temptations and trials of every kind (Mark 1:12; 16:17-18). The wilderness is wild; the wilderness is the world. Fear not! As the angels were ministering to Jesus again and again (imperfect tense), so they will minister to us again and again. In everything, every moment, every trial, even the hour of death, there is one unbreakable promise: "They shall recover" (Mark 16:18).

Look It Up

Read Mark 16:15-20.

Think About It

Tempted, he transfigured us into himself. —St. Augustine

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

Calling

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless'" (Gen. 17:1). Age is just a number. And what is time to God Almighty? "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night" (Ps. 90:4 KJV). God Almighty appears and speaks without invitation. God is not compelled, not forced, and certainly not commanded by human goodness. Grace alone accounts for God's appearing and speaking to the old man. But grace is not cheap, for the unearned call comes with an unearned vocation. "Walk before me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1). In this sense, even law, if understood as vocation, is a grace.

This is the promise. "You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations" (Gen. 17:4). Abram's barren wife, Sarai, is not left out. "She shall give rise to nations; kings of people shall come from her" (Gen. 17:16). Not a single nation, but many nations grow from this one couple, who are accounted righteous not because of anything they have done but because God Almighty appears and speaks and commands. Thus, while law is good both as vocation and restraint, law is not the first word. The first word is, "The Lord appeared and said" (Gen. 17:1).

Faith is a summoned response, a response that, though human, is rooted in the free prompting of a giving God. Human freedom and divine gift are two freedoms that meet in the mystery of God's calling. For when it is said that Abraham "grew strong in his faith," it is said incorrectly. There is no "his" about which he may be proud. Rather, the sacred word says this: "he was empowered by faith." Abram is receptive, but passive. God's got the faith and gives it (Rom. 4:20).

Because the call is rooted entirely in God, the calling may go out even to those who never share in the riches and the wrath of law. God comes not because Abram is blameless but because God's will and love and command simply come to him. So God may come to anyone and, if we believe the old story, God seems almost to prefer those accounted as good as dead: the very old, the barren, the forgotten, the weak, the sick, the lost.

Leaving nothing out, God comes to death itself. "Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31). He descends to the dead not because age and disease undo him. Rather, he bears the curse of death, human abuse, and rejection. He is consigned to nothingness. Jesus is no more, dead, lifeless. Grace has gone to the horror of hell and called out.

A dead Jesus speaks: "Come to me." "If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). The promise is sure. There is a cross, a crush weight awaiting everyone, a dying unto death. It is one thing to be accounted as good as dead, another to be absolutely dead. Stone cold death is the raw material of a mind-bending miracle. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thess. 4:14 KJV). Again, we see the revelation of God Almighty, mighty to call even the dead to life.

Look It Up

Read Ps. 22:28.

Think About It

Your cross. Dying you must do in a thousand ways. Yet *undying life* is at work in you.

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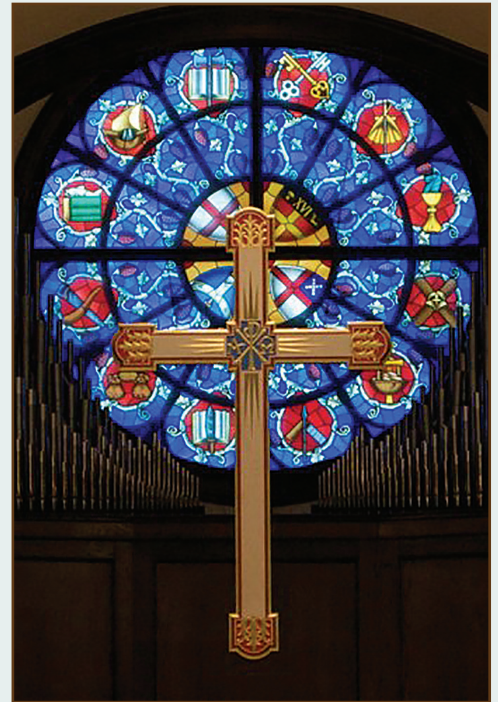

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