Self-Control | Women in Scripture | *Wolf Hall*

April 5, 2015

THE LIVING CHURCH

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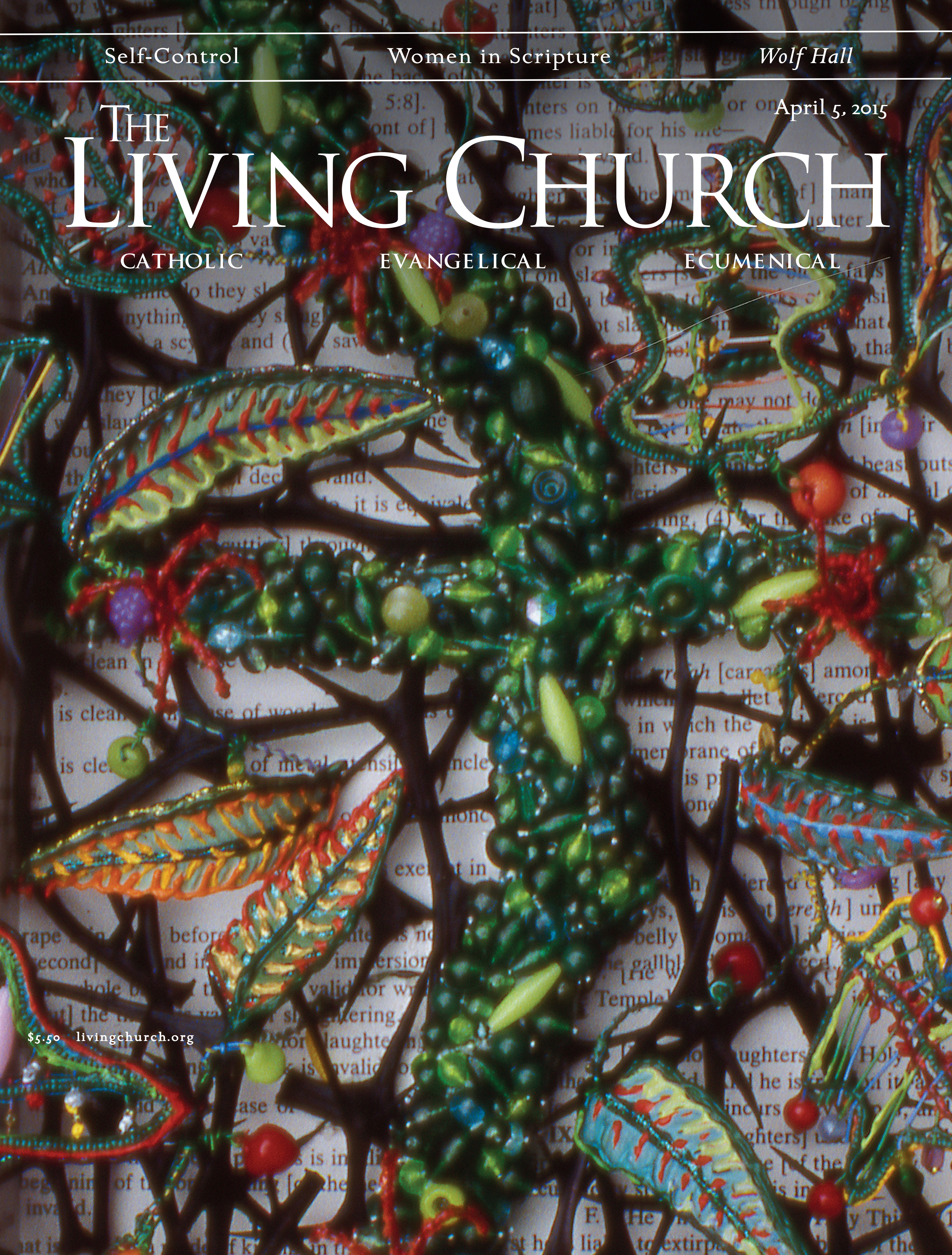

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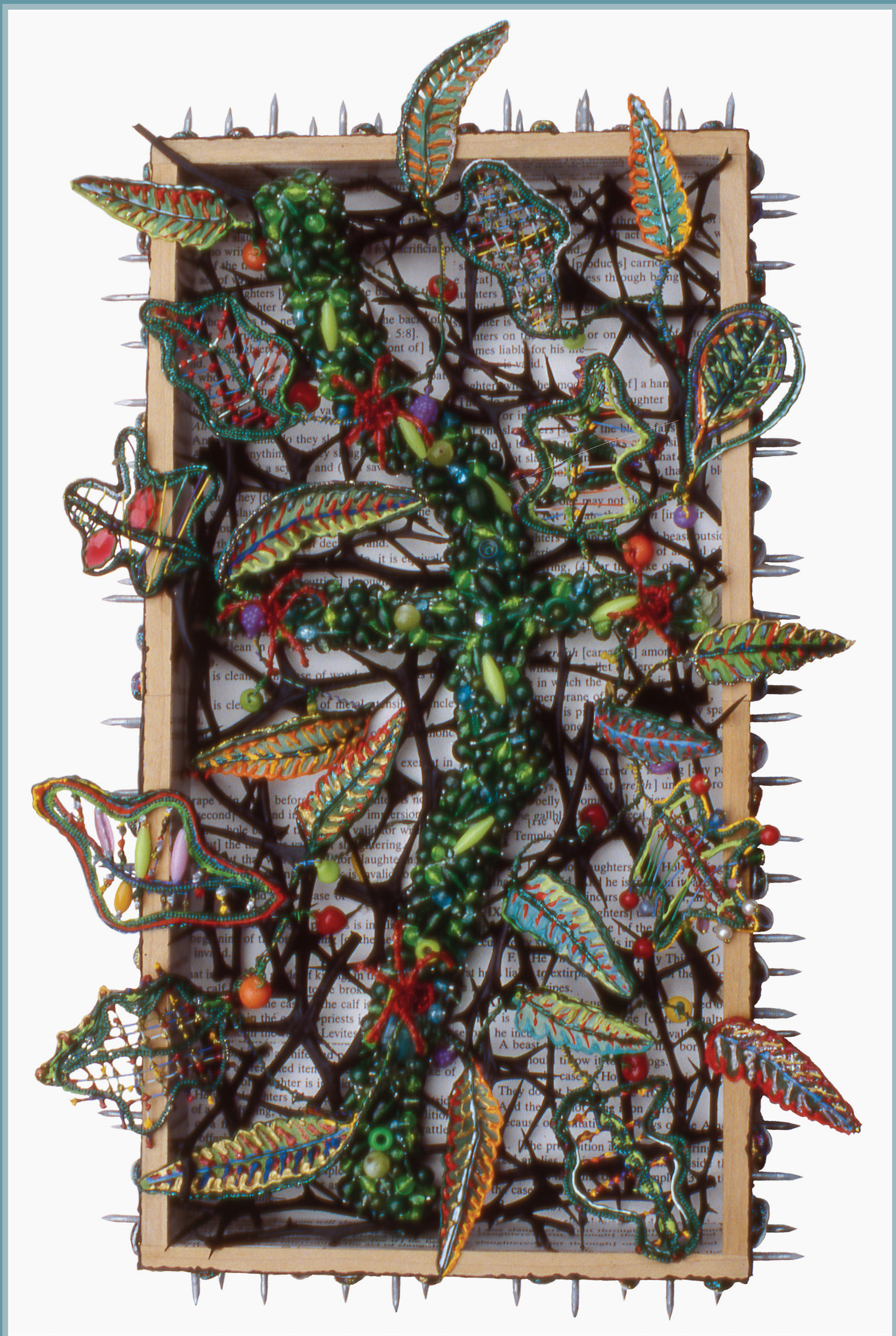
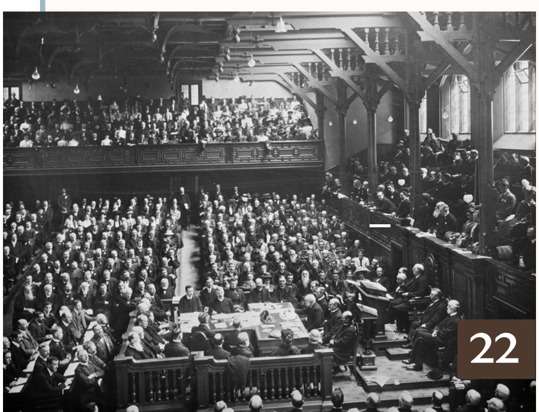
We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.



ON THE COVER (and left)

Green Cross | By Mary McCleary

19 x 12 inches 1992, mixed media collage on paper



THE LIVING CHURCH

THIS ISSUE | April 5, 2015

Living Church Partners

We are grateful to St. Stephen's Church, Durham, Saint Thomas Church, New York [p. 24], St. John's Church, Savannah [p. 25], and Christ Church, San Antonio [p. 27], whose generous support helped make this issue possible.

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St. John's Helps Guatemalans

When children from Central America arrived by the thousands last summer on the U.S-Mexico border, the people of St. John's Church in McAllen, Texas, knew what was driving the exodus: poverty, violence, and desperation.

Now St. John's is leading an international project aimed at addressing root causes behind the perilous migration. The parish is planning to build a trade school in Chichicastenango, Guatemala, where girls and boys ages 12 to 15 will learn marketable skills in sewing, carpentry, and welding.

"This project will help generate income for the younger indigenous people that have fallen victim to starvation," the Rt. Rev. Carlos Enrique Lainfiesta, Bishop Suffragan of Guatemala, wrote in a proposal in November. "The project will immediately address the crisis that the country is going through and help prevent emigration to other places."

St. John's is working with the Diocese of Guatemala to fine-tune plans and with the Diocese of West Texas to fund it. Bishop Lainfiesta expects to need $160,000 to acquire land near where the poorest residents live, build facilities, and operate the school for the first three years.

The idea for a school gained traction quickly last year when clergy from St. John's approached Bishop Lainfiesta and received a warm response.

"He said, 'I have had this plan for years but never had a way to do it,'" said the Rev. Nancy Springer, associate rector at St. John's.

Startup funds are largely in place, thanks to an excess $150,000 in donations received last summer for local relief efforts among migrants detained and released at bus stations in border cities. McAllen was ground zero for the immigration crisis, and St. John's served as an assistance hub. Twice a week, volunteers packed travel kits for kids and parents who lacked basic provisions and hadn't yet reached their destinations. Funds poured in to support the effort.

Not all the collected funds were needed, however, after the crisis eased in mid-summer. That left about $50,000 at St. John's and $100,000 at the diocese — almost enough to launch a new trade school. Donors who gave more than $500 have a choice whether to send their funds to the school or to another cause, or to ask for a refund. St. John's is prepared to raise additional funds if necessary, Springer said.

Organizers hope the school will put a dent in the abject poverty that weighs on Santo Tomas Chichicastenango, a growing city of 150,000. Government statistics show 84 percent of its residents earn less than $2 a day. One in four earns less than $1 a day, which qualifies as extreme poverty by Guatemalan standards.

"If we can give these young boys some skills," Springer said, "we can give them some hope so that the next generation doesn't grow up in the same hopelessness that they've grown up in."

Chensiyuan/Wikimedia Commons photo

An open-air market in Chichicastenango

Volunteers from St. John's have firsthand knowledge of the acute needs and suffering in this mountainous region of Guatemala. For many years, the parish has been sending members on two annual mission trips to the region. One focuses on construction projects and distribution of cooking stoves to homes in remote communities. The other addresses basic medical and dental needs.

The school will train workers for jobs in the trades and for an emerging Guatemalan textile export industry. Locals hope employment opportunities will grow as the number of qualified workers increases and markets for finished goods expand in the United States. Representatives from St. John's and the Diocese of West Texas plan to help the business arm of the school make connections in the United States to open sales channels.

The school's curriculum will have a cultural aspect as girls are taught self-esteem, family planning, and abuse-prevention. On Saturdays, children will take Christian formation classes at the school.

If all goes according to plan, the school will be self-sustaining within three years as proceeds from textile exports and welding contracts help defray costs and keep the education tuition-free. If the school makes a profit, those funds will be shared among participating families. Construction could begin as soon as this summer.

G. Jeffrey MacDonald

Dominican Republic Picks Three

The Diocese of the Dominican Republic has nominated three priests in its search for a bishop coadjutor. The bishop-elect will succeed the Rt. Rev. Julio C. Holguin, bishop since 1991.

The three nominees, who are school principals in addition to their priestly ministries, are:

- The Rev. P. Ramón Antonio García De los Santos, 50, vicar of Misiones San Lucas and La Anunciacion in Santiago
- The Rev. P. Moisés Quezada Mota, 58, vicar of Misiones Jesus Nazareno and Buen Samaritano in the city of San Francisco de Macoris
- The Rev. P. Daniel Samuel, 58, vicar at Misiones Santa Maria Virgen, Divina Gracia, and San Cornelio

Selma Remembers Four Martyrs

Ceremonies marking Bloody Sunday's 50th anniversary paid tribute to four slain civil-rights activists, including Episcopal seminarian Jonathan Daniels.

Hundreds of people participated in the anniversary march in Selma, Alabama. They honored Daniels and Jimmie Lee Jackson, a 26-year-old Baptist deacon; Viola Liuzzo, a Unitarian activist from Detroit; and the Rev. James Reeb, a Unitarian minister.

Two landmark churches — Brown Chapel A.M.E. and Tabernacle Baptist Church — were the host sites. The 50-mile march from Selma to Montgomery led to the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

At Tabernacle Baptist Church, site of the first mass meeting of the Selma Movement, the crowd sang "This Little Light of Mine" and paid tribute to the four Movement Martyrs during a service on March 5.

The Rev. Clark Olsen, now 81, was with Reeb as several men attacked them with clubs outside an integrated restaurant in Selma on March 9, 1965. Reeb later died.

Olsen paused to take a deep breath as he recounted how several white men hurled racial slurs at them and another white minister, the Rev. Orloff Miller, as they left the restaurant after dark.

"Jim just wanted to do the right thing," Olsen said. "I did, too."

Brown Chapel A.M.E. was headquarters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The five-day march began there on March 21, 1965. Daniels and the other activists were honored at Brown Chapel in a brief ceremony after a morning service on March 8.

The Rev. Leodis Strong, pastor of the church, said the martyred activists — all white except for Jackson — represented sacrifices by people of all races. He pointed to a bronze plaque by an entrance to the church that identifies the four activists as Martyrs for Racial Justice. The Episcopal Church recognized Daniels as a martyr in 1991.

Jim Key, moderator of the Unitarian Universalist Association, said at Tabernacle Baptist Church on March 5 that he was profoundly moved to "honor the martyrs … and look to the future."

"We knew then, and we know now, that history is being made here," Key said. "Yes, we are here in gratitude for those who gave their lives. Yes, we are here to remember and honor the history that was made here 50 years ago; but, dear friends, you and I know that there remains work to be done."

The annual Jonathan Daniels Pilgrimage in Hayneville — a solemn procession through the town followed by a service of Holy Communion in the

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Selma

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courtroom where the man who killed Daniels was tried and acquitted — is scheduled for August 15 this year.

Some march participants contrasted their experiences with the narrative of *Selma*, the recent film directed by Ava DuVernay.

"It was a scary time," said John Ballard, 70. "But as a white person, you could step into the movement when you felt like it, then step out again. Black people didn't have that luxury."

Linda Lowery was the youngest person, at 15, to walk the entire 54 miles from Selma to Montgomery when she was 15. She enjoyed the film as entertainment. But she also noted that the movie, like so many dramas, took artistic license on facts.

"We did not, for example, have a coroner's office in Selma at that time," Lowery said. And Jimmie Lee Jackson did not die immediately, as in the movie, but eight days later.

More broadly, veterans of the civil rights movement have said the movie marginalized the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Willie Ricks, a SNCC organizer, said that while Martin Luther King, Jr., and his associates were focusing on Selma, he and other SNCC radicals, including Stokely Carmichael, were in Montgomery being beaten by policemen on horseback as they tried to march on the Alabama State Capitol. Ricks, now 72, called that confrontation the "Battle of Montgomery."

Diane Nash, a cofounder of SNCC, said that she welcomed the movie because it showed black people as thoughtful, patient, nonviolent, and loving. She said it underscores that a culture can grow without the intervention of a "white savior."

Nash, now 76, said that in recent weeks she had tried to defend the film's depiction of President Lyndon Johnson as initially reluctant to support King. Nash said she was outraged by claims that President Johnson suggested the march.

Nash said that she and James Bevel, her former husband, "conceptualized and wrote" the plan for what

Gary G. Yerkey photo

Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church

became known as the Selma Right to Vote movement and presented it to King, who endorsed it.

Nash wrote in a syndicated newspaper column: "I appreciate LBJ's enacting and signing the Voting Rights Act [of 1965], but I wish he had been a self-starter when it came to our right to vote, so it would not have been necessary to go to the lengths that we did — organizing a mass movement and risking our safety — in order to get the vote."

Congressman John Lewis (D-Ga.), former chairman of SNCC, said it is unfair to expect *Selma* to give a comprehensive account of the three-year movement. He agreed with Nash that Selma was not Johnson's idea.

Gary G. Yerkey

Persecution in Pakistan

Signs of Christian persecution were all too visible in Pakistan this winter, from tents housing hungry Christian refugees to armed security standing guard atop a church roof as the faithful warily arrived for Sunday Eucharist.

But jarring, onerous conditions have not broken the spirit of the church in Pakistan, said the Rev. Canon Patrick Augustine, who returned in February from visiting his native country. Christians there continue to worship, witness, and even plant churches, he said, albeit with little fanfare and much discretion.

"The Islamic militancy tries these attacks to frighten them to give up their faith and accept Islam," said Canon Augustine, rector of Christ Church in La Crosse. "But it has not, in their knowledge, helped to convert one Christian to Islam. It has actually deepened their commitment to be a Christian … and to offer a message of peace and reconciliation in the capital of terrorism."

In his travels, Augustine saw how the traumatized community of All Saints, Peshawar, has, by necessity, taken on a fortress atmosphere. Gone is All Saints' weekly Sunday soup kitchen, which was attacked by suicide bombers in September 2013. The attacks killed 127 and injured more than 250. The church and its government protectors could not secure such a ministry, Augustine said.

Now a new six-foot wall topped with barbed wire surrounds the church in a crowded part of the old city. Members of the congregation keep watch at entrances. Those who enter must pass under cameras and through metal detectors. Armed guards keep watch on rooftops.

Inside, however, signs of hope stir. Nearly 400 worshipers gathered when Augustine preached. That's down from 700 before the attacks but up from fewer than 100 in the immediate aftermath. The congregation prayed, as it does every week, for those who attack local Christian and Muslim communities. During the week, clergy sometimes host interfaith gatherings of religious leaders. They also walk the neighborhood, visiting with shopkeepers and being visible in a low-key way.

"Given the security situation, there are not many ministries they can do because that area is prone to Al Qaeda activities," Augustine said. "But they try to reach out to their neighbors."

Violence was not far away. Word spread one January morning that a Diocese of Peshawar high school in Bannu had been overrun by a mob with guns and machetes in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris. Augustine made the four-hour trip with the Bishop of Peshawar and five local clergy to visit and comfort the rattled community.

Soldiers found a bomb hidden at the entrance of a Christian neighborhood during Augustine's visit. They removed it and no one was hurt, but anxiety ran high as he prayed with and for Christians in Bannu.

"The plan was to explode the

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Pakistan

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bomb and kill Christians in the Christian colony," Augustine said. "They were all shaken and very afraid. Anything can happen during the night."

In Bannu, he found 200 Christian and Shiite Muslim families from the countryside living in tents inside a diocesan compound. They had left their homes in Waziristan, an Al Qaeda stronghold, where they had faced discrimination from Islamic relief organizations and struggled to survive, according to Augustine.

Inside the compound, one family of 11 had run out of food. Augustine authorized $500 from his congregation's gift to the Diocese of Peshawar to supplement the family's ration.

Later in his trip, he visited the region of Azad Kashmir, where a Christian family offered its land as a site for worship and a cemetery. It will be the only church in the region. Christ Church, La Crosse, is collecting donations to help build it and support other ministries in Pakistan.

And Augustine found signs of hope in the small city of Mardan. The government was helping to rebuild St. Luke's Church, which attackers burned down in 2012. He was there on a Friday, when the city was effectively shut down for Muslim prayers. About 20 young adults gathered at the church in the afternoon, as they do every Friday, taking their seats on the ground. There they studied Scripture, prayed, and sang hymns.

"They were not pastors, they were not bishops, they were just high school and university college students," Augustine said. "Somehow all these situations of persecution and challenges to their faith have made them even stronger."

G. Jeffrey MacDonald

Two Last Great Speeches

Journalist Chris Matthews of MSNBC moderated a three-member panel March 5 that compared President Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural and the speech Martin Luther King, Jr., gave on the night before his death.

The panel met at Washington National Cathedral on the 150th anniversary of President Lincoln's address, as still another round of snow loomed in the forecast.

The discussion was co-hosted by Ford's Theatre, the site of Lincoln's assassination by actor John Wilkes Booth on Good Friday of 1865 (April 14). King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis by James Earl Ray, a fugitive from the Missouri State Penitentiary.

Although separated by a century, both speeches were seminal in the country's march to civil rights. Both men gave their speeches shortly before their deaths. And both men "talked right into the face of their enemies," Matthews said.

The Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde, Bishop of Washington, said that King delivered his final Sunday sermon at Washington National Cathedral.

"This is a place to mourn, to celebrate, and to consider critical issues of our day," she said, noting the statues of King and Lincoln that stand within the cathedral's stone walls.

In comments to TLC after the program, the bishop said she gives thanks that the cathedral can be a place for reflection on important moments in history and how their "echoes and resonance" relate to events of today. "We have this theological connection to history," she said.

The Very Rev. Gary Hall, dean of the cathedral, noted that President Obama has called for a national conversation on race. "America's history on race is coming back," and this polarizing issue needs to be addressed looking to Lincoln and King for guidance, he said.

"The legacy of slavery is still deeply part of our national problem," one that will never completely go away, the dean said.

In comments to TLC he said of slavery: "It's such a profound wound in our culture, such an ugly thing; it's always going to be there. … We can be in recovery from it. We can be healed but we can't be cured."

Lincoln was haunted by the price of "this terrible war," which had been running for four years, said panelist Douglas L. Wilson, co-director of the Lincoln Studies Center at Knox College. Lincoln had been convinced that he would not be re-elected as president, Wilson said.

Although Lincoln was not an overtly religious man, he believed in God and in a moral universe. "We will never know what would have happened if Lincoln had lived," said Paul R. Tetreault, director of Ford's Theatre. "But we can't help but wonder."

King never set out to be a civil-rights activist, said panelist Clayborne Carson, founding director of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute at Stanford University: "He was a social-gospel minister who got distracted by civil rights."

King was concerned about slums, poverty, and economic hardships. "He was a prophet; the biblical prophets were not popular in their time," Carson said. "He was ready for death; he had always been ready for that."

The mountaintop speech has "meaning that goes beyond the meaning of what most people expect," he said, expressing a transcendent quality of hope and goodness on Earth that has elements of the Exodus.

Lincoln's Second Inaugural was plainly spoken by a politician with a factual beginning that "starts out almost like a shareholder's report," Dean Hall said, while King's speech was the expansive work of a visionary preacher, with a storyteller's drama.

Despite their differences, both men were theological speakers in their own way.

"We live in a time of declining political oratory," Hall said, too often marked by public speeches that are "phony and formulaic."

Peggy Eastman

Canon Scanlan Elected Bishop

The Diocese of Central Pennsylvania has elected the Rev. Canon Audrey Cady Scanlan as its 11th bishop. Scanlan is canon for mission collaboration and congregational life in the Diocese of Connecticut. She was elected on the second ballot. The electing convention met at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Harrisburg on March 14.

"I am delighted to have been chosen to serve as the next bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania," Canon Scanlan said. "I look forward to a challenging and fruitful time working alongside the faithful people of the diocese to join in building God's Kingdom. … God is good and there is much joy in store for us."

The Rev. Nathan Baxter, the diocese's 10th bishop, retired in May 2014 after serving for eight years. The Rt. Rev. Robert R. Gepert is provisional bishop. The consecration is scheduled for Sept. 12 at the Downtown Hilton in Harrisburg.

Canon Scanlan was born in New York and has lived in Connecticut for the past 50 years. She and Glenn, her husband of 30 years, are the parents of Emma, 27; William, 25; and Harriet, 22.

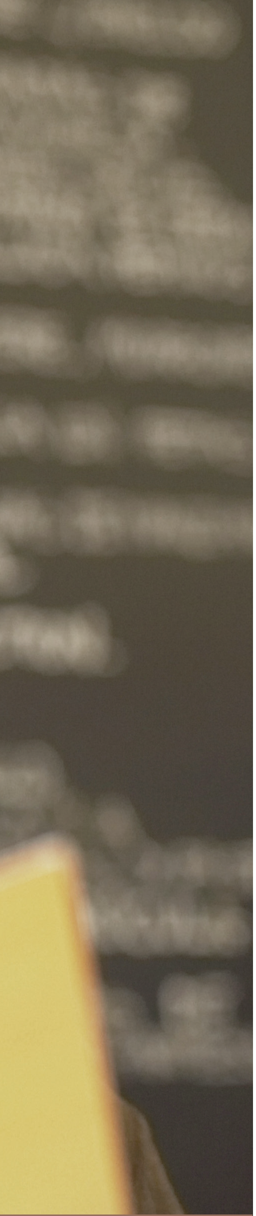
The other nominees were the Rev. Canon David A. Pfaff, 49, former canon to the ordinary in the Diocese of Milwaukee; and the Rev. Douglas Everett Sparks, 59, rector of St. Luke's Church in Rochester, Minnesota.

Self-Control:

The Neglected Fruit of the Spirit

By Matthew A. Gunter

Human beings are made to receive and give love, joy, and peace. We were created to bear these and the other fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) in communion with God and with one another. But the ground of that communion is often stony and choked with weeds. Like a good farmer, we must rely on God's grace — the sun and rain — if we are going to be spiritually fruitful. But, also like farmers, we are not passive partners. God pours out his Spirit freely, but we must cultivate the soil of our hearts and our communities. This means we need to pay more attention to that least popular fruit of the Spirit: self-control.



When Paul was called before Felix, the governor of Judea, and his wife, Drusilla, he spoke to them "about faith in Christ Jesus" and "justice and self-control and future judgment" (Acts 24:24-25). It is interesting that Paul mentions those three things as what follows from faith in Christ Jesus. Most will recognize justice and future judgment as basic Christian concepts, but do we consider self-control one of the fundamental marks of being a Christian?

Are we any less self-indulgent than our non-Christian neighbors? Are we notably more moderate in our consumption of food and drink? In our accumulation of wealth? Our gratification of sexual titillation? And what about indulging our more deadly spiritual passions? We live in an affluent and self-indulgent society. Our imaginations have been effectively catechized by consumerism and its insistence that we should avoid every discomfort and satisfy every appetite. This leaves us forever discontent and miserable. St. Neilos described well in the 5th century the effect of these insatiable appetites: "being self-indulgent, [we] do not realize how [our] soft living constantly breeds new and extravagant desires." Jesus likewise warned: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence" (Matt. 23:25).

Self-control is a recurrent theme in the New Testament and the early Church. It is rooted in Jesus' declaration that self-denial is a basic requirement for being among his followers (Matt. 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23). It is listed as a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23) and as one of the three things — besides power and love — that God has given us instead of a spirit of timidity (2 Tim. 1:7). It is listed as one of the criteria for being a bishop (Titus 1:8). The early Church continued recognizing the centrality of self-control to the Christian way. John Cassian (ca. 360-435) wrote that "no virtue makes flesh-bound man so like a spiritual angel as does self-restraint, for it enables those still living on earth to become, as the Apostle says, 'citizens of heaven'" (see Phil. 3:20). St. Thalassios the Libyan (7th century) wrote: "Stillness, prayer, love, and self-control are a four-horsed chariot bearing the intellect to heaven."

Self-control is central to Christian faithfulness because it gets at the root sin of self-centeredness. Out of that root grow "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19), making us "slaves to various passions and pleasures" (Titus 3:3). Such warnings against "passions" show up frequently in the New Testament (see Rom. 1:26, 6:12, and 7:5; 1 Cor. 7:36; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 2:3; 2 Tim. 2:22; Titus 2:12 and 3:3; James 4:1 and 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:14, 2:11, and 4:2-3; 2 Pet. 2:18 and 3:3; and Jude 1:16 and 1:18).

Here it gets tricky. Ask anyone what "various passions and pleasures" might refer to and the answer will almost certainly be that it refers to sex. While self-control in sexual behavior is a concern and *passion* in the New Testament sometimes refers to sexual passion, *works of the flesh* and *passions* are about much more than that. According to Titus 3:3, being "slaves to various passions and pleasures" means "passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another." And when Paul lists the works of the flesh that are opposed to the Spirit, along with "fornication, impurity, and licentiousness," he also lists

Are we any less self-indulgent than our non-Christian neighbors?

Are we notably more moderate in our consumption of food and drink?

"idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" (Gal. 5:19-21).

Reference to *passions* was technical language used broadly in pagan philosophical morality, as well as in the New Testament and the early Church, to refer to interior spiritual agitations that lead to thoughts and behaviors that are contrary to our nature and lead us away from God's good pleasure. As such, *passions* refer to all sinful desires and emotions that draw us away from love of God and love of neighbor. Passions are the weeds that are forever sprouting up in our hearts to choke out the fruit of the Spirit.

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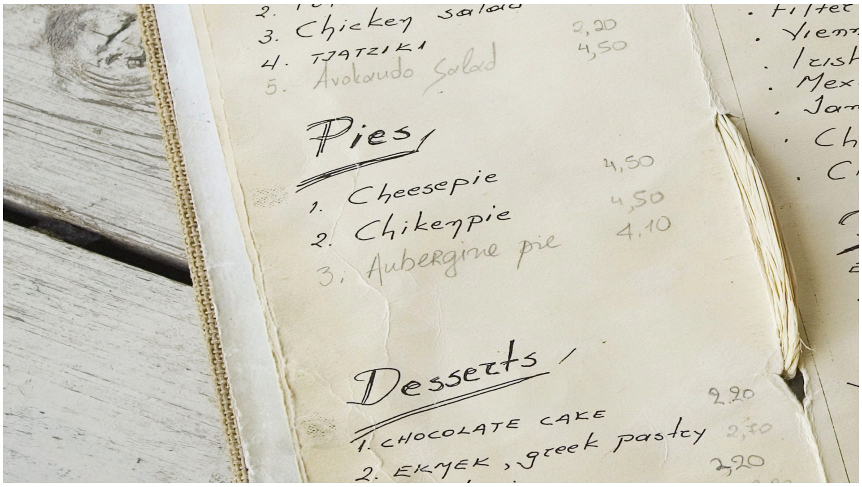

If we can exercise self-control at the most basic physical realm of the stomach and other bodily desires, we can begin to exercise more self-control in the spiritual realm of the heart.

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Self-control is a neglected fruit of the spirit that needs cultivating in the contemporary Church. Its lack is at the heart of much of the Church's spiritual shallowness. It is counter-cultural. It calls for self-sacrifice, which is a virtue more commonly admired in theory than put into practice. But there is no real love, certainly none as Jesus calls us to love, without it. Cultivating love and the other fruit of the Spirit and "weeding out the fruit of the flesh" is what self-control is about. The logic of the New Testament and the early Church suggests that this starts with control of our physical appetites. There are many reasons why control of those appetites is good for us. Uncontrolled indulgence of those appetites or passions is detrimental to our physical health and to the health of our communities. Many in the early Church also considered such indulgence unnatural.

• *Our sexual attitudes and behavior.* Chastity and modesty are classic Christian virtues of sexual self-control that we would do well to reclaim. That means rethinking some of our entertainment as well as our behavior. Even if we are persuaded that the blessings and disciplines of marriage can be extended to same-sex unions, we should resist capitulating to our society's abandoning of self-control.

• *Our consumption of food and drink.* The classic virtue of moderation suggests that we can exercise self-control and learn to eat no more than we need to maintain our health. Fasting is a discipline that we would do well to incorporate into our lives beyond Lent.

• *Our accumulation of stuff.* The classic virtue of simplicity is about exercising the self-control to be content with enough rather than constantly accumulating more and perpetually pursuing the newest and latest toys.

• *Our passion for busyness and distraction.* Observing Sabbath requires the self-control to stop striving and to rest in the assurance that God is indeed in control.

These classic disciplines of self-control of our physical passions are just the foundation of the more significant — and more difficult — self-control demonstrated in the self-denying, self-offering love to which Jesus calls us. The wisdom of the early Church is that if we can exercise self-control at the most basic physical realm of the stomach and other bodily desires, we can begin to exercise more self-control in the spiritual realm of the heart, where the more insidious sins lurk: anger, malice, enmity, envy, impatience, vainglory, and so on. As Jesus said, "it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:21-23). Indulging in these passions is also contrary to our nature as bearers of the divine image.

We live in an affluent, indulgent society, but Christians ought not indulge our every passion and desire, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. We have been given a spirit of self-control. Disciplining our bodily appetites rather than indulging our desires and pampering ourselves frees us to pursue self-control when it comes to those more difficult passions of the heart. Rather than allowing the weeds of impatience, anger, malice, envy, enmity, resentment, jealousy, judgmentalism, pride, factionalism, and quarrels to run rampant we can prepare the soil of our hearts and cultivate the fruit of the Spirit. That is the shape of Christian holiness. Such fruitful holiness does not come easily. It requires self-control.

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

— Twenty Minutes with the Rev. Lindsay Hardin Freeman —

Treasure the Pearls

The Rev. Lindsay Hardin Freeman is an Episcopal priest, writer, and speaker who lives in Minnesota. She has written and edited six books, including *The Scarlet Cord: Conversations with God's Chosen Women* (Circle Books, 2010) and *The Spy on Noah's Ark and Other Bible Stories from the Inside Out* (Forward Movement, 2013). In *Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter* (Forward Movement, 2014), Freeman explores the words of each woman who speaks in the Bible. *Bible Women* was cosponsored by the national board of Episcopal Church Women.

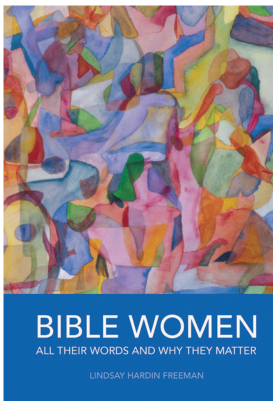
By Sarah Puryear

***Bible Women* wasn't written in an ivory tower; instead, you shared this work with your parishioners, who helped you research the women who speak in the Bible and what they say. How did this origin within your parish influence the book?**

In 2011, I'd just finished a book, *The Scarlet Cord*, in which I explored the lives of 12 Bible women by projecting into what they might have said and felt. At that time, my husband, the Rev. Len Freeman, and I had just started work as interim rectors at Trinity Church in Excelsior, Minnesota, and I found myself really curious to know which women actually talked in the Bible and what they had to say. I asked if there were people who would be interested in working on these questions, and three stepped forward: a recently retired woman, a homeschooled teenaged girl, and the church librarian.

After a thorough search of seminaries and libraries, we concluded that it was in fact new territory, that no one had pulled women's words out of the Bible and studied them on their own terms. So we worked chapter by chapter, word for word, using sticky notes, markers, and spreadsheets over the course of three years. The group was incredibly conscientious, analytical, and honest. We laughed over some of the stories, cried over others, and felt sick to our stomachs at some of the brutality encountered by some of the women in the Bible.

Our group ranged in age from 15 to about 65, and we drew on a women's group within Trinity, "Wednesday Women," for support and inspiration as well. We're not PhDs or literary critics. We're Episcopalians, active in our faith and steeped in the tradition, reason, and Scripture. Turns out there were 93 women who spoke in the Bible; we identified each one and recorded every word. But more important than numbers are their stories. And as we learned and retold their stories, we found we have much in common with them. I couldn't have written the book without the research group; every page is steeped in their hard work and discipline, as are many of their words.



The Bechdel test reveals gender bias in media by asking one question: does this movie or book depict two women talking to each other about something other than a man? I'm afraid your book reveals that few conversations in the Bible pass that test. What are we as women in the 21st century to do with, on the one hand, the disappointment we might feel upon learning how rarely women's voices are heard in the Bible and, on the other, our belief in the Bible as the inspired Word of God?

I asked the research group about this question, and Sue Webster, one of our researchers, stated it best: "The Bible is what it is." It wasn't written to please us. It was written over thousands of years to tell God's story. In the loftiness of the 21st century, we may be disappointed that women's words account for only about 1.2 percent of the total word count of the Bible. Yet look at it this way: the words of Bible women are like pearls. When someone wears a rare set of pearls, people don't complain and say, "Your pearls only account for a small percentage of pearls found in the ocean!" Rather, they are valued because they are unique; we give them more value because they are hard to find. It's like that with women's words in the Bible. Now that we can look at them clearly, let's see what they say. Let's learn from them. Let's treasure them.

I also don't know of any other document in human religious history, across all religions and cultures, that holds up the words of 93 women throughout the ages — women who are both fallible and flawed, faithful and focused. If anything, the fault is in the way humankind has looked at the viability of these Bible stories about women over the years. Women's voices are clearly in the Bible, but over the years they've been largely dismissed. Our goal is to change that, and we've had some success in doing so. The Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* ran a front-page news story about *Bible Women* and the process of writing it in early February 2015, and since then, news outlets around the world have picked up the story.

That intersection of Church and world is a tremendously exciting place to be, and it's where Bible women have always been. Women of the Bible have been taking missionary steps for thousands of years, and it's a great honor to highlight their efforts.

You talk in your book about the stereotypes of female characters in the Bible, that they are either all good or all bad. What kind of nuances did you discover in your research that challenged that two-dimensional view?

Somehow over the years, women in the Bible have emerged as really good (Mary the mother of Jesus), or really bad (Jezebel or Delilah). But we forget that the women in the Bible are just like us: flawed and sometimes broken, but always beloved. Most of the women in the Bible were brave. Almost all of them were highly focused. Most were faithful. But being human, they had both positive *and* negative personality characteristics — and God was able to use all of their gifts and limitations, much like today.

Rather than chapters written in paragraph form, most of the book consists of profiles of each woman who speaks in the Bible. How do you envision people using this book?

One can read it straight through, or one could go by subject guides in the back, such as "Women and Business," "Mothers in the Bible," or "Diplomats and Survivors." It's written for both group Bible study and individual reading.

It's also written with a light touch. For example, some women are widely known. But others most people have never heard of, like the wives and women of

(Continued on next page)

We forgot how brutal life was for women in Old Testament days, not just in the Bible but in most of the world back then.

(Continued from previous page)

Pathros who harass the prophet Jeremiah. We acknowledge in the book that Felix the Cat is better known than they are, and then we explore what it means to be in exile and what that has done to their faith.

Tell me about one female character in the Bible with whom you were unacquainted before this project and who has stayed with you since working on this project. What have you learned from her story and the words that she spoke?

The women in the Apocrypha had somehow passed me by over the years, even though I'd read the Bible cover to cover in seminary. There's a woman in 2nd and 4th Maccabees who was forced to watch her seven sons be tortured to death in front of her, yet she encouraged them to keep their faith — and they were killed because they worshiped God. She, too, went down to the grave proclaiming her love for God. I cannot shake that image, as I cannot shake the image of the concubine in Judges 19 who was never allowed to speak but who was sent out by her husband to be gang-raped so as to answer the brutal demands of desert hospitality. He then divided her body into 12 pieces the next morning, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. She and others who could not speak or were not quoted are actually the ones to whom this book is dedicated.

What cultural filters do we bring to the Bible that may prove unhelpful? What realities about the various cultures reflected in the Bible do we need to keep in mind while reading these stories?

We forgot how brutal life was for women in Old Testament days, not just in the Bible but in most of the world back then. Love was not part of the equation for most of them. They really were considered property. So to look at the stories through the lens of living in a fairly oppressive society required a new way of seeing things on our part as researchers. For example, there's the story of Aschah, in Joshua 15 and Judges 1, who is offered by her father as a bride prize to the man who would defeat the Canaanites in battle. To think of anyone being offered to the so-called highest bidder these days is awkward and unpleasant, never mind illegal. But those were different days. Her father found someone for her who was strong, bright, and a leader of men. And then, in an unprecedented move, he also gave her land. By itself, that is a fairly big deal. But she knew that she needed water for that land if it was to prosper. So she turns around and reminds him that she needs water. He comes through with more land that contains significant sources of water. It's a great story — but you do have to see it through an ancient lens to appreciate its significance.

My favorite theological takeaway from your book was the reminder that being the "least" is not a disadvantage in God's kingdom, for God often does mighty things through those who are powerless and lowly. What was the central truth about God that was reinforced for you as you studied the Bible for this project?

The central truth is that God loves us all dearly and, yes, those without power often have the most power in God's eyes. Another stunning central truth is found in the depth of relationships that Jesus had with women, friends and strangers alike. For example, the very first woman to talk in the New Testament (Matt. 9:20-22) is the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years and powered her way through the crowd, sure that if she could touch Jesus she would be made well — and she was. We often stop there in looking at that story and miss this part: that, after she was healed, Jesus asks her to come forth, identify herself, and tell her story of healing and redemption. That's huge: a despairing, untouchable, poverty-stricken woman not only finds healing but is affirmed for who she is, for the faith journey she has made.

We also find substantially deep relationships between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha of Bethany, and wonderfully profound encounters with the Samaritan woman in John 4 and the Syro-Phoenician woman in Matthew 15 and Mark 7. In John's Gospel, the first word spoken by both the angels at the tomb and Jesus is *Woman*. Lots to think about there; lots to celebrate.

Do you have a favorite female character in the Bible? Who and why?

My favorite has always been Rahab, a prostitute in the city of Jericho, who hid two men from Joshua's army on her roof under piles of flax. When the king's guards demanded that that she turn them over, she said they had already left. Risking her own life, she saved theirs — but would not let them go until they promised to save her and her family when Jericho was destroyed. She's an ancestor of Jesus and a strong woman acting with the resources she had. She was from outside the circle in several ways, but her actions saved tens and, most likely, hundreds of thousands of people. She's one of several colorful maternal ancestors — the kind that always spice up family reunions.

The Rev. Sarah Puryear lives in Nashville with her husband, Dan, and son, Hays, and serves as priest associate at St. George's Church. She writes for TLC's weblog, Covenant.

The Mantel Version

Wolf Hall
PBS
Directed by Peter Kosminsky

Masterpiece/PBS photo

Review by John Martin

American viewers are in for another sumptuous serving of British television drama when *Wolf Hall* premieres on April 5. Based on the first two Booker prize-winning novels of Hilary Mantel's planned trilogy, the six-part series centres on King Henry VIII's "fixer," Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540).

Do not confuse Thomas with Oliver, the parliamentarian who brought down King Charles I in 1649, although they were related. Cinema buffs may recall him as the sharp-toothed and unprincipled villain played by Leo McKern, who relentlessly pursues the saintly Sir Thomas More to execution in *A Man for All Seasons* (1966).

This is the major talking point from *Wolf Hall*. Who offers the right assessment — Robert Bolt, or Hilary Mantel? For many Roman Catholics, More has the status of a saint. Convent-educated Mantel turns convention on its head. Her More is a venomous misogynist and torturer who cannot conceive of a Christendom tolerating religious dissent. Her Cromwell, in contrast, is a mild-mannered family man who teaches his young daughters Latin.

In Mark Rylance's characterization of Cromwell, silence or a mere look can be worth a thousand words. His characteristic pose is to stand by quietly, almost out of sight, while others incriminate themselves by their words. More (Anton Lesser) sums him up: "Lock Cromwell in a deep dungeon in the morning and when you come back that night he'll be sitting on a plush cushion eating larks' tongues, and all the gaolers will owe him money."

Screenwriter Peter Straughan has crafted a clever and at times almost word-for-word adaptation of Mantel's version of these men. Mantel combined exhaustive historical research with a novelist's imagination to fill many gaps in the narrative, characterisation, and conversation. As she said in an interview as the television series unfolded in England: "My own method is to wrap the fiction around the documented record, to let imagination lead us by touch into rooms where history can't shine a light."

Historical research is a different craft than that of the novelist or television dramatist. Tracy Borman, a recent biographer of Cromwell, has argued that complexities can be ironed out in a work of fiction: "Because she is writing a novel, Hilary Mantel obviously feels she needs a goodie and baddie and so she tees Cromwell up as the goodie by making More the baddie."

Early sequences introduce a young Cromwell, the son of a sadistic blacksmith from riverside Putney, west of London. He escapes England after an awful beating from his father. When he returns to England he is a mature man, schooled in the law and finance. Along the way he has acquired sympathy for the cause of the continental reformers and supports William Tyndale's Bible-translation project.

The narrative finds Cromwell in the employ of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (Jonathan Pryce), chief ecclesial advocate for King Henry (Damian Lewis) but now out of favour. Wolsey has failed to deliver a solution to

(Continued on page 24)

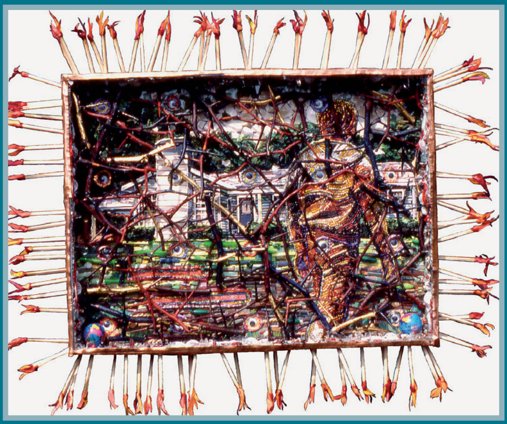
9.81 Meters Per Second Per Second | 45 x 71.5 inches 2005, Mixed Media Collage on Paper

CULTURES

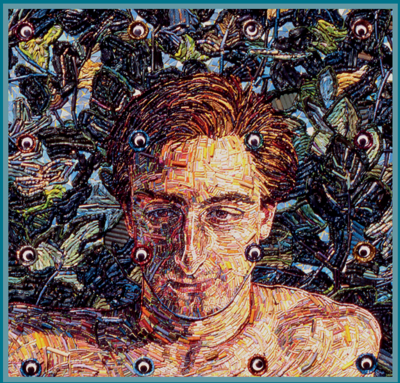
IMAGE

Holy Week

By Mary McCleary
www.marymccleary.com



Satan Disguised as an Angel of Light | 16.25 x 20.25 inches
1990, Mixed Media Construction in Masonite Box



Nathanael Under the Fig Tree | 22 x 23 inches
1994, Mixed Media Construction on Paper

VERSE

By Ephraim Radner

Cat Time

I met a cat
on my window ledge.
And there he stood
on the flowered edge
two-hundred feet above.

"Cats don't fall,"
my wife politely said.
Yet I found one
upon the pavement, dead
and with its legs all splayed.

Its head lay softly
to the side, while ants
were gently stepping
on one eye, a dance
I watched, but no one heard.

Above him soared
a palace, whose windows winked
and smiled in the light.
I sighed. What could I think,
but that the wind was strong?

"Come close," I said;
"and I will take you in."
He turned the corner, floating,
tail swinging, the thin
red flowers swaying.

Victory Time

The devil is a big monster who eats people.
I mean really big: like a mountain,
with a mouth larger than a canyon,
with teeth as sharp as the rocks
that line the summits and river beds.
He stands overlooking the plains
and gorges himself, small legs and feet
crumbling out of his lips in his haste,
tumbling over his bibless belly
onto his dripping toes.
Such an appetite, and so many
tiny creatures falling in bits!

Across a big river
all the saints have gathered and yell
at him, shaking their fists,
making rude gestures.
"Nyah, nyah, nyah!" they cry.
They mock in swelling unison.
The ground is shaking,
a rift is splitting through the rocks.
They are decreeing a new law:
Nyah, nyah, nyah!

The birds are swirling about
in between, circling, swooping,
back and forth over the river,
waiting to see where to descend,
gulls over a trawling vessel,
not yet come to port.
It is as if no one has told them,
and they are lost and drifting,
uncertain, uneasy.


Playwright Don Nguyen with Pham Thi Hue — Dau Nguyen photo

Honor for a Vietnamese Heroine

By Retta Blaney

Playwright Don Nguyen saw potential in a *New York Times* story about an HIV-positive woman who started the country's first HIV support group for women in Haiphong, a large port city near Hanoi. But he questioned his ability to capture their reality.

"I'm Vietnamese but I grew up in Nebraska," he said. "They felt very foreign to me. I wasn't sure how I could write their voices. It was a fascinating subject but seemed daunting to take on."

Then he remembered an ancient Vietnamese legend of the Trung sisters, who gave their lives in a fight against the Chinese army. Nguyen saw a creative challenge in combining the factual story with the myth, as both were about strong women fighting for liberation.

The play that resulted, *Red Flamboyant*, will be staged at the Parish of Calvary-St. George in Manhattan from April 24 through May 16. It is produced by Firebone Theatre, an Off-Off-Broadway company that explores "the relationship between divine immortality (fire) and human mortality (bone)."

Nguyen, 42, and Firebone's artistic director, Chris Cragin-Day, 37, talked with TLC in Cragin-Day's office at the King's College, where she she teaches English and theatre.

"I love the feminist aspects of this story," Cragin-Day said. "I love these women who are just so powerful, not in a social sense but in a soul sense."

That soul sense also attracted Dusty Brown, director of Calvary-St. George's Olmsted Salon, an arts and culture ministry.

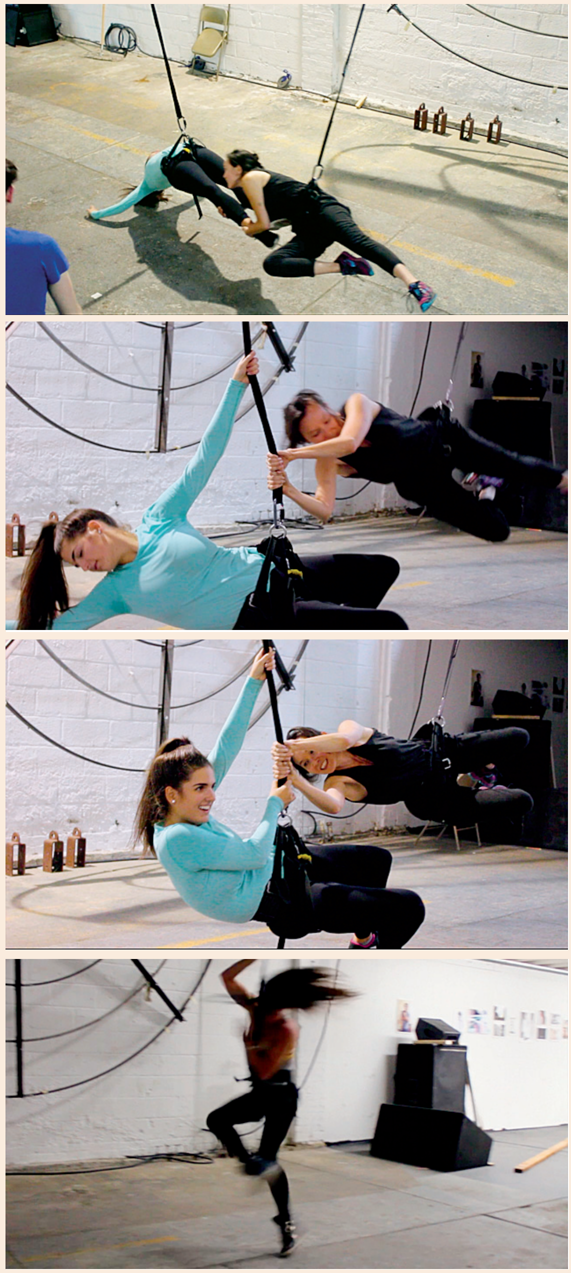
"We want to explore life through culture and conversation, to bridge the gap between the church and the greater culture at large," he said. "We want to stimulate conversation and make the church safe for everybody."

"Grace and mercy are experiences everyone can relate to," Brown said. "They come after experience with the law and judgment."

The real-life inspiration for the main character, Mrs. Hue, is Pham Thi Hue, who was featured in the 2006 *Times* story. Although AIDS was widespread in the country, many of those who had it were shunned by their families and fired from their jobs. Most of the women were infected by their husbands, who were drug users.

Hue called her shelter Haiphong Red Flamboyant after a Vietnamese flower. She struggled constantly to find money for food and assistance. Bricks occasionally shattered the windows of Red Flamboyant.

Nguyen had not known HIV/AIDS was so prevalent in Vietnam.



Cast members practice on single-harness bungees for the innovative choreography of *Red Flamboyant*.

"It affected me, being Vietnamese, and that the country I was born in had such a huge problem," he said. "The stigma around it was shocking to me and I wondered how I could get a germ of a play from that."

He began writing in 2008. A naturalistic play about Hue and all those dying of AIDS would be "an overwhelming experience for the audience," he said. "I had to find a less realistic way. The Trung sisters' legend demanded more heightened reality. It dictated the voice of the play."

The Trung sisters formed an army to seek revenge after the Chinese killed one sister's husband. The Chinese fought back and demanded the Vietnamese give up the sisters. They sacrificed themselves by jumping into a ravine.

Nguyen recognized a connection between Hue and the legendary sisters: "She was a modern-day warrior who could be juxtaposed with the ancient female of Vietnam to make a great story."

But by 2010 and his "20th draft," he was frustrated. "I felt like I was writing from a distance with these people."

He decided to see Vietnam firsthand and possibly meet Hue. Since he did not speak Vietnamese, he asked his parents to accompany him. They readily agreed.

A cousin in the country found Hue and told her about the play he was writing. She agreed to a meeting. It was then that it hit him: suppose the real Hue was nothing like the character he had created?

After three weeks of postponed appointments with Hue and rescheduled flights, it seemed ill-fated.

"I thought, *I'm not going to see her and that's fine. I got close*," he said. "It was really a good test of faith."

But they met at last. With his father interpreting, Nguyen talked to Hue for an hour. When he mentioned he was incorporating the sisters' legend, "her eyes lit up." She told him the Vietnamese believe that "if you do something great, you are a sibling of the Trung sisters."

She asked him to make it clear that she receives no government support. In that strong insistence he recognized the character he had created was very much like the real Hue.

As Nguyen was leaving, Hue said something to him in Vietnamese. He smiled and nodded. In the taxi his father told him what she had said: "Don't forget about me."

Ten percent of *Red Flamboyant*'s ticket sales will support Hue's work through a foundation based in the United States.

Some of the actors in *Red Flamboyant* will fly, using single-harness bungees for a freer-flowing choreography. Staging these aerial feats is challenging for a small company like Firebone, but Cragin-Day sees advantages.

"We take risks. Companies like ours don't have much money at stake."

Still, the company bought extra insurance and hired Karen Fuhram of Ground Aerial Dance Theatre, an expert in the field, to handle the choreography.

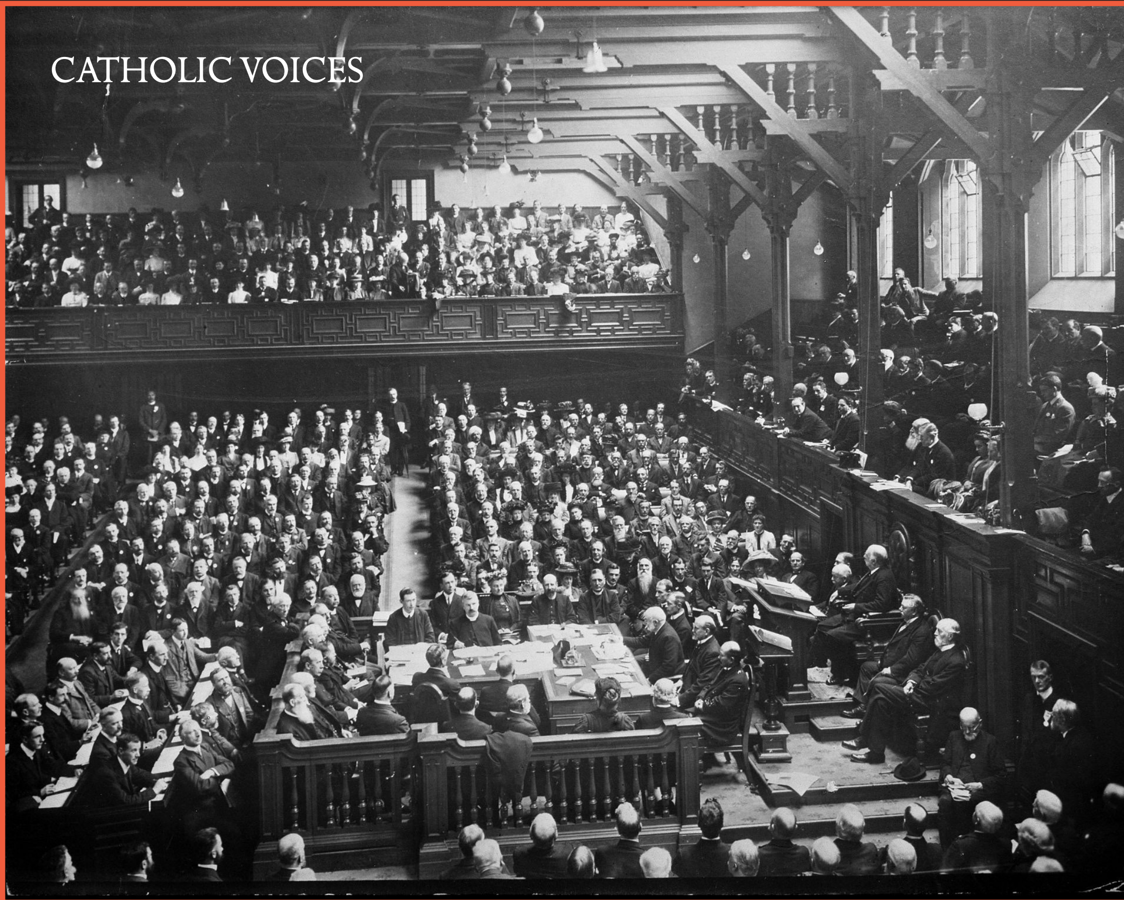
"It gives us the freedom to experiment with the human body in flight," Cragin-Day said.

She believes the play will speak to many people, especially women.

"I feel like it's not just about Vietnamese women," she said. "This play captures that spiritual strength that is the legacy of women, and that's beautiful."

Retta Blaney is the author of Working on the Inside: The Spiritual Life Through the Eyes of Actors.

CATHOLIC VOICES



The 1910 World Missionary Conference, also called the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, met at New College, University of Edinburgh. Wikimedia Commons photo

Missiophobia: Cause and Cure

By Robert S. Heaney

I would like to coin a term: *missiophobia*. It might be defined as aversion to, embarrassment about, disapproval of, discrimination against, even irrational fear of mission. I experience it in the classroom and I sense it in conversations with a wide range of Christians and their leaders. I feel it in myself. It may result from curtailing mission to only charity or social action, or even overusing the words *mission* and *missional*. The adage rings true: If everything is mission, or becoming mission, then nothing is mission.

Both narrowing the meaning and broadening the use of mission perpetuate the original sin of missiology, namely, the assumption that mission is what humans do.

The famous Edinburgh conference of 1910 gathered 1,200 participants representing 160 mission boards or societies. The goal was to develop strategies for greater world evangelization. It could be done. It would be done. Christianity would expand from Europe and North America into the so-called pagan and uncivilized corners of the world. It was an anthropocentric and "ecclesiocentric" time, soon challenged by the devastating effects of World War I and a looming World War II. In place of rationalist optimism, churches needed a more circumspect theology that faced the failings of humanity and Western Christian expansionism.

One year before Hitler came to power, Karl Barth called the Church back to its trinitarian source:

> Must not even the most faithful missionary, the most convinced friend of missions, have reason to reflect that the term *missio* was in the ancient Church an expression of the doctrine of the Trinity — namely the expression of the divine sending forth of self, the sending of the Son and Holy Spirit? (Norman E. Thomas, *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*, p. 105; see is.gd/GodMission)

A Christian theology of mission does not first ask *What is the church?* but rather *Who is God?* Though the triune God is one, God is not an individual. God in community is ever self-giving and interpenetrating love in action. The *mission of God* refers first to an eternal "going out" and "sentness" between Father and Son and between Son and Spirit. Then, in time, God's self-giving love and life spill over in a cosmic, creative act, as a word: "Let there be light." On both counts, God is mission and enacts mission.

How might such a trinitarian foundation, the very divine nature and agency, affect our participation in mission?

First, the mission of the Church is two steps removed from the divine referent. Mission is God's being and God's creative act. Christians are called to discern God's mission and seek to participate in it. Thus, Christian leaders need not somehow generate enthusiasm for mission or, God forbid, seek to create it. Much of modern history notwithstanding, mission is not the province of activists. Taking heed of God's mission may well begin with contemplation and discernment rather than strategies, priorities, or budgets, since it emerges from deeper knowledge and experience of God. Mission begins with the breath of God and is entered into by prayer.

Second, alongside contemplatives, a renewed theology of mission requires the critical voices of those who have received the modern missionary movement. Arguably, the best theology is done across cultural boundaries. In crossing boundaries one is involved in the daily work of translating the gospel, heeding context, and having the experience of God's grace and judgment through the Other. Anglicans must face up to the imperialism, colonialism, and racism of past and present missionary activity. We need partnerships of mutuality across cultures and positive, prophetic engagement in interfaith conversations.

Third, the mission of the trinitarian God means contextualization. God has come to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Thus, the Christian Church is the community of resurrection (Rom. 6:1-10). Missional community emerges in light of the resurrection (Acts 4:32-34). Indeed, the Church is *created* and *defined* in light of God's re-creative mission (1 Cor. 15:45-50). Church, in a very basic sense, is a community that has met the risen Christ (Acts 2:22-42). A communitarian dynamic founded on Christian trinitarianism and founded on the particularism of a Gospel of resurrection means wrestling with how Christian hope emerges in specific contexts.

If the first missional act is God's creation, then the second missional act is re-creation. Despite human sin, God's love, grace, and very life overflow. Incarnated in Jesus Christ, God's re-creation breaks into the world with the power of the Spirit in the resurrection of Jesus. In this way, participation in Christ enacts a renewed, sacramental humanity. As Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder observe, Christian liturgy transforms the faithful as they encounter the missionary God, "so that the liturgy never really ends" and "life becomes, as the Orthodox love to say, the 'liturgy after the liturgy'" (*Constants in Context*, pp. 363-64). This is not mere ritual. Rightly practiced, the Eucharist culminates in a sending out of the community of Christ.

Discerning the mission of God in a worshiping community means that mission has a theological foundation and a liturgical heart. A prayerful life nourished by Scripture provides the way of formation, which makes us agents of God's mission. As a self-emptying exercise, prayer affects how we act, feel, and prioritize. It invites others and the otherness of God to interrupt our agenda and desires through Christ, who was himself emptied (Phil. 2). Through the cross our Lord Christ subverts the category of lordship (Matt. 16:16-26). The cross brings power relations to the center of theology and mission; it calls us beyond the comfort and convenience of our private lives and preferred liturgies to an attentive listening and dialogue.

As God's activity, mission embraces the Church and the world, and the Church is "privileged" to participate, as David Bosch says. We needn't be afraid. *God* saves — by crossing boundaries of culture, tradition, history, empire, religion, and unbelief.

The Rev. Robert S. Heaney is assistant professor of Christian mission and director of the Center for Anglican Communion Studies, Virginia Theological Seminary.

CULTURES

The Mantel Version

(Continued from page 17)

Henry's demand for divorce so he can sire a male heir. Almost seamlessly Cromwell transfers his career to the service of Henry. His inscrutable face masks a long memory, however. When the time is right he will exact revenge on the men who did his former patron down.

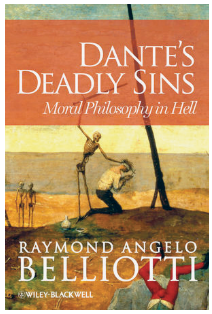
Cromwell masterminds the ecclesiastical coup that cut England's ties to the Pope, made Henry supreme governor of the Church of England, and placed Anne Boleyn (Claire Foy) on the throne as the king's consort. It is Anne who gives energy to the Henrician Reformation. Clearly Cromwell detests many Roman Catholic practices. To replenish Henry's coffers he instigates takeover of the monasteries and redistribution of their lands among the king's cronies. In the great traditions of British historical drama, costumes and sets are delivered in lavish detail.

Good drama, not least historical drama, can hold a discomfiting mirror to our times. *Wolf Hall* does that and more. Is life under the Islamic State or the Taliban all that different from early-Reformation England, where religious dissenters were racked, works of art vandalized, and monastic treasures looted?

In the final moments of Wolf Hall, King Henry VIII encircles his man with a royal bear hug. Cromwell has engineered the trial and execution of Anne Boleyn. Henry is free to pursue his neurotic obsession to sire a son with his new wife, Jane Seymour (Kate Phillips). The look on Cromwell's face is worth unnumbered words; he seems to know already that his days of political power are numbered. But that is another story.

John Martin is a correspondent for TLC in London.

BOOKS



Dante's Deadly Sins
Moral Philosophy in Hell
By **Raymond Angelo Belliotti**.
Wiley-Blackwell. Pp. 199. $29.95

Anticipating Sartre?

In his play *No Exit*, the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre imagines hell without fire and brimstone, devils, or pitchforks. To Sartre, hell was being locked eternally in a room with others, culminating in his assertion that "Hell is other people." Sartre uses a reimagined hell to highlight key existentialist concerns that we can never "be" anything, that our essence must derive from our existence, and that it exhibits "bad faith" to lack authenticity. In Sartre's mind, there is no need for metaphysics, only for human reality.

Raymond Angelo Belliotti, a professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Fredonia and the author of more than 15 books, extends Sartre's vision back to *The Divine Comedy*. Belliotti readily admits that Dante and Sartre fit uneasily together. After all, Dante was a medieval Christian, while Sartre was a 20th-century atheist. Dante believes in a universe infused with order, while Sartre posits an absurd life. Dante sees the world as heading toward the beatific vision, while Sartre considers the afterlife a myth.

Despite these difficulties, Belliotti maintains that Dante anticipates some claims of 20th-century existentialism. For example, Dante emphasizes our personal freedom and the consequences of our choices on our lives. To Belliotti, this matches existentialist teaching that we are responsible for our own actions. Belliotti believes that both existentialists and Dante have a common concern for “soul-crafting.” Further, both Dante and modern existentialism agree that authenticity is essential for a good life.

Despite his valiant efforts, Belliotti overstates his claim. The most serious evidence for this is his failure to handle the *Paradiso* at all. Belliotti includes discussions of the punishment of sins according to the rule of *contrapasso* (retributive justice) in the *Inferno*, with a lengthy treatment of the seven deadly sins. He also conducts a case study on why Cato, a Roman Stoic who committed suicide after resisting Caesar, was an appropriate figure to guard the entrance to Purgatory.

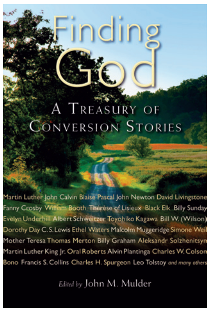
But he has almost nothing to say about heaven. To interpret the *Comedy* without its end in mind is to give it an odd reading. Existentialism simply has little to say about an ordered, hierarchical heaven as the goal of our lives. Hence, it stretches Dante to the breaking point to assert that he matches thematically with modern existentialists.

Belliotti’s strained reading is also on display when he discusses Virgil, Dante’s guide throughout much of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. Belliotti has difficulty understanding why Virgil, who lived before Christ’s first advent, found himself in the highest echelon of hell, limbo. Not only is there no discussion of original sin, but he has no convincing answer for why Virgil, the greatest of the virtuous pagans, never made a leap of faith toward grace. This evidences a truncated view of sin, which causes us to turn away from God and toward changeable things. Thus, Belliotti’s reading of the *Comedy* is innovative, even enjoyable at times, but not terribly persuasive.

Kevin Dodge
Dallas

Saints Great and Small

Finding God: A Treasury of Conversion Stories is a curated anthology in the words of some of the most influential Christian leaders, as well as some lesser-known saints. Originally published as *Conversions: The Christian Experience*, and then *Famous Conversions*, John M. Mulder’s collection continues the work of his mentor, Hugh T. Kerr. These are personal stories and, although many of the figures are larger than life, they are all sinners who found their health in the gospel of Christ.



Finding God
A Treasury of Conversion Stories
By **John M. Mulder**.
Eerdmans.
Pp. 418. $22

There is much room for debate between the dogmatic realties in which each convert resides. Mulder sidesteps these theological gaps nicely by allowing Teresa of Avila, or John Wesley, or Bono to speak for him or her self. Mulder and Kerr have done well in providing historical, theological, and spiritual contexts to each of the entries. The accounts of some converts, such as Jonathan Edwards, will prompt a visit to the bibliography.

Converts of the ancient and medieval Church are not represented well, which Mulder acknowledges in the introduction. He mentions sociological and theological reasons why conversion stories are fairly rare until the dawn of the Reformation.

Mulder’s can be as a starting point in a small-group setting, helping people to reflect on their own lives in Christ.

The Rev. David Bumsted
Sarasota, Florida

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Acts 10:34-43 or Isa. 25:6-9 • Ps. 118:1-2, 14-24
1 Cor. 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43 • John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8

He Appears

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power" and "he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). Indeed, God was preaching peace by the ministry of his Son, a peace to all nations (Acts 10:36; Luke 2:10). As the peacemaker, he is Lord of all. He is in his person, in his word, in the traces of his touch, in his gaze, in sensory healings, a loving erosion of the mortar securing the bricks in the high walls of hostility (Eph. 2:14). But in this world, walls matter. They make a home and a city and a nation. Woe to the Christ who would make the walls come tumbling down. So, "they put him to death by hanging him on a tree" (Acts 10: 29).

St. Paul shares a grace by which the gospel is preached. It comes, he says, by "I or they" (1 Cor. 15:11). Sadly, there is a shared sickness too by which the gospel is rejected. "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). So, as if driven by evil necessity, Jesus dies. But as he trembles in grief and anguish and bloody tears, his death is a departure he foreknows, an end that finally he accepts. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). Our sins did the deed.

Although hung for the peace he pursued, his death was not death's victory, the stone put to his grave not forever sealed. On the cross, with gaping mouth and gasping breath, "he swallowed up death forever" (Isa. 25:7). The pall over the nations lifted, the temple curtain torn, the earth shaken and rocks split, even tombs opened and the saints raised. Signs, strange to be sure, of a single wonder. Death could not contain him.

But who would believe it? Having seen that the stone was rolled from the entrance to the tomb, Mary Magdalene reports to Simon Peter and the beloved disciple: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb" (John 20:2). Leaning into the cave, seeing angels, she speaks again: "They have taken away my Lord" (John 20:13). The beloved disciple sees and believes, but what he believes is unclear, "for as yet they did not understand the scripture." (John 20:8-9). Perhaps Magdalene and the disciple share a common creed. Jesus is dead and his body gone.

The way the story unfolds, the truth the story tells, and the life the story portrays — all are beyond all human knowing. Jesus appears alive from the dead, not merely alive as a living man, but as the God-man who has gone to a harrowing hell at the hands of sinful humanity and yet comes again in love and forgiveness. He speaks the intimacy of names. He speaks to Mary Magdalene, and to Cephas and the 12, and 500, and then speaks through time until he speaks today. I hear him. I know him. I dare say it. Though last of all in ways I ought not to say, he has chosen me as a witness. As a witness of the good news of his resurrection, I stand, and hope to hold firm until his lordship is the peace of the world (Acts 10:36).

Who am I to tell, but I must as a witness, one chosen and called. I know where he is. He is going just ahead of you. Look! See him, just as, in the deep chamber of your heart, he told you (Mark 16:7).

Look It Up

Read Mark 16:8.

Think About It

The women are as silent as death. Then they speak..

SUNDAY'S READINGS | 2 Easter, April 12

Acts 4:32-35 • Ps. 133 • 1 John 1:1-2:2 • John 20:19-31

The Senses Know

The disciples have all things in common, but bear testimony not to their lifestyle; they are one in heart and mind, but speak not of inner peace and collective harmony. They garner great virtue and give evidence of grace, but give no self-congratulating confession (Acts 4:32). Rather, they "testify to the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (Acts 4:33). For it is in the grip and power of Christ's resurrection that they are compelled to give to each according to need, and to feel and know that the heart and mind of one is a matter of concern to all.

They are in the orbit of this power; their gaze is turned to it. Indeed, all their senses awaken to Christ the Risen One. A lesson begins with a sentence that begins with these words: "We declare to you." The conventions of a modern English translation, however, have been untrue to our text; the truth is tucked away in the safe cover of the Authorized Version: "That which was from the beginning, which *we have heard*, which *we have seen with our eyes*, which *we have looked upon* …. *We have seen*, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us — that *which we have seen and heard we declare* to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3 NKJV).

Before public proclamation, there is seeing with eyes to see, touching with hands to touch, hearing with ears to hear; a deep sensory encounter with Christ so magnificent and overwhelming that it raises the disciples to communion with the Father, which they experience through their communion with the Son. They proclaim the Risen One whom they know and the communion he gives and the joy that is complete only as Christ's new life goes out to the ends of the earth (John 1:4).

Is there another way to know Christ, to know without seeing and touching and hearing? A story is told. Jesus appears to the disciples and greets them in the narrative present: "Peace be with you" (John 20:19b). Before the greeting, he arrives and stands among them. He is there, alive and yet still bearing his body broken. His brow is bruised, his hands and feet pierced, his side split open, his back marred and ripped. The disciples see and believe. But not Thomas; he is not there.

Hearing the report of the appearance, Thomas says: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hand, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). So, appearing again, Jesus invites Thomas to reach and touch. Thomas believes because he sees. Jesus says this: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29). The second, third, and forth generation of Christian disciples never heard the tone of Jesus' voice, never felt his human hand, never looked upon the visage of the God-man.

He is, to be sure, in the mind and heart. But he is, no less, where the holy water is, the unctuous olive, the board of bread and word, the joining of hands, a priest forever, a sin repented, a pall put to a coffin: embodied wherever he wills to be.

And he wills to be in our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, and especially the redemption of the whole circle of the languishing lands.

Look It Up

Read Psalm 133.

Think About It

Use the oil of gladness. Let it run from your face to your robe. Can you feel the everlasting?

.

Always Welcome

Unless you are really sneaky, you will be welcomed on the sidewalk the first time you come to Christ Church, San Antonio. If you fill out a visitor card, the preacher will call you that evening, and then send a letter, to say thanks and please come again. You will be invited to join others at the rector's home on the first Sunday of the month for lunch and relaxed conversation. Next is a small group, eight-session course, held quarterly, to look at the most important questions from the gospel. And in another eight-session course, held in the fall, we examine the Episcopal Church's history, worship, teaching, mission, and spirituality. Out of this class, some are confirmed, others are received into the church, and others reaffirm their faith. In all events, we're serious about saying "hello." This is our mission at Christ Church: *Drawing, Changing, and Sending People through the Power of Christ.* We hope you take us up on our welcome, and perhaps join us in our mission.

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