

Biweekly \$7.95

August 10, 2022

THE Christian CENTURY

Thinking Critically, Living Faithfully



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A
GREEN CHURCH?

PLUS

ABOLITIONIST SPIRITUALITY

GOD AS DIVINE MOTHER

**THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX
CHURCH AT THE WCC**

THE MYSTERY OF TREES

SPIRITUALITY & ECOLOGY

OCTOBER 19 – 22, 2022

WEDNESDAY 4 PM –

SATURDAY 1 PM

MARQUETTE, MI



- An overview of the essential role of forests and trees in planetary health.
- Journal readings from 17th century Jesuit priests who first explored this region of the Great Lakes.
- Perspectives from wild-land forest fire fighters and commercial foresters.
- Reflections on trees as symbols from diverse religious traditions.
- Opportunities for rest, solitude, and time in contemplative prayer.
- On our last morning together, participants are invited to collectively plant 100 cedar trees in the Yellow Dog River Community Forest.

**3 NIGHTS LODGING AT THE HISTORIC THUNDER BAY INN IN BIG BAY, MICHIGAN
9 MEALS INCLUDING DINNERS AT TWO CABINS NEAR THE SHORES OF LAKE SUPERIOR
TRANSPORTATION PROVIDED FOR ON-SITE ACTIVITIES -IF TRAVELING BY AIR**

**RETREAT COST: \$1250 -REGISTER BY SEPTEMBER 15
EARLY BIRD SPECIAL: \$995 -REGISTER BY AUGUST 31**

**FACILITATORS: JON MAGNUSON, RUTH ALMEN, KENT FISH, JOHN ROSENBERG,
JOSEPH PICCIONE, KATHLEEN HEIDEMANN, JEFF NOBLE**

CONTACT: www.cedartreeinstitute.org



From the editor/publisher

Peter W. Marty

Foundational texts

The owners of Possibility Custom Homes in Magnolia, Texas, are proud of the foundational role they believe God's Word has played in their lives. They're so proud of it that, for more than a decade now, they've been encasing a Bible in the foundation of every new home they build. It's the kind of foundation they believe every family deserves. As concrete pours down the chute of the mixing truck into the foundation form boards, a laborer steps forward with a soft-cover Bible in hand, leans over, and submerges the book into the moist aggregate. Embedding the written text in hardening concrete is a pretty sure way to mummify it permanently.

Biblical literalists, who in some circles are called fundamentalists or inerrantists, may be able to appreciate this unique form of concretizing the Word more than others of us. They're known to revere the Bible as much as the message within it. Their version of faith celebrates the factual accuracy of every verse, fixating on the text as something of a frozen body of ancient knowledge. Literalists like to insist on one reading for all time. As far as they're concerned, the text is settled, closed, and beyond interpretation.

Judicial originalism, I would argue, is something of a younger cousin to biblical literalism. Adherents to the originalist doctrine expect jurists to follow the exact words of the Constitution, the meaning of which they believe was locked into place (or concretized) at the time they were written. Antonin Scalia, who championed the modern surge of originalism as much as anyone, liked to say that the Constitution is about "rigidifying things." Even though there's no way to determine precisely what every phrase of the Constitution originally

meant, given the complicated political debates that informed them, originalists assume that the words of the framers had settled meanings.

Critics of the originalist project find it absurd to give exclusive place to text over context. They believe the framers of the Constitution themselves would be astonished to find this almost godly devotion to their every utterance. The architects of our republic were complicated individuals, after all; brilliant and visionary on the one hand, yet weak and flawed on the other.

We should applaud those who critique a rigid or static view of the written text and prize its intentionally broad and open-ended language. They know that the great principles of the Constitution, along with its very specific rules, require interpretation for our dynamic and evolving society. They cry out at the literalism of various Supreme Court justices (such as the late Hugo Black, who famously objected to busing because he couldn't find the word *bus* in the Constitution). They wince at the brash inconsistency of originalists on the court who recently voted to expand the right of states to regulate abortion while restricting the right of states to regulate guns.

Unfortunately, like the Bible, the Constitution doesn't provide a method for interpreting itself. And yet, we have no choice but to interpret. The nature of language is such that no word communicates just one idea or meaning in every context where it's used. "Nobody's reading is final or inerrant," writes Walter Brueggemann about scripture. "All biblical interpretation is inescapably provisional and inevitably disputatious."

If only more originalists in our day could appropriate the idea of theologian Karl Barth for their own Constitutional work. "I take the Bible far too seriously," said Barth, "to take it literally."

Editor/Publisher
Peter W. Marty

Managing Editor
Steve Thorngate

Senior Editors
Amy Frykholm
Elizabeth Palmer

Associate Editor
Jessica Mesman

News Editor
Dawn Araujo-Hawkins

Audience Development Editor
Trice Gibbons

Community Engagement Editor
Jon Mathieu

Poetry Editor
Jill Peláez Baumgaertner

Editorial Assistant
Marie Watson

Research Assistant
Annelisa Burns

Editorial Interns
Ross M. Allen
Ginger Monroe

Advertising Manager
Heidi Baumgaertner

Art Director
Daniel Richardson

Production Assistant
Diane Mills

Director of Finance
Maureen C. Gavin

Marketing Consultant
Shanley & Associates

Contributing Editors

Brian Bantum, M. Craig Barnes, Debra Bendis,
Walter Brueggemann, John M. Buchanan, Jason
Byassee, Lil Copan, Martin B. Copenhaver, Lillian
Daniel, Beverly R. Gaventa, Adam Hearlson,
David Heim, Philip Jenkins, L. Gregory Jones,
Richard A. Kauffman, Celeste Kennel-Shank,
Thomas G. Long, Robin W. Lovin, Thomas Lynch,
Bill McKibben, Debra Dean Murphy, Kathleen
Norris, Stephanie Paulsell, Kathryn Reklis,
Barbara Brown Taylor, Debie Thomas, Emilie M.
Townes, Jonathan Tran, Isaac S. Villegas, Miroslav
Volf, Grant Wacker, Samuel Wells, Reggie
Williams, William H. Willimon, Carol Zaleski

August 10, 2022 Vol. 139, No. 16

IN THIS Issue

6

Letters

Preaching at funerals

7

Small acts, big signs

The Editors: Why acting against climate change matters

8

CenturyMarks

Debt protection, Turkey no more, etc.

10

Tough choices in Karlsruhe

Ross M. Allen: Will the WCC expel the Russian Orthodox Church?

12

Mountains of grief

Neal Plantinga: The pastoral calling to help people mourn

22

Thinking big (and small)

Anna Woofenden: What does it mean to be a green church?

26

The mother of Israel

Malka Simkovich: In the Hebrew Bible, God's love is maternal

30

Abolitionist spirituality

Willie Dwayne Francois III: A call to sacrifice, advocacy, and repair

Cover by Daniel Richardson

NEWS

- 14** Faith leaders attend celebration of gun control law; Episcopal general convention focuses on racism, justice issues;
Presbyterians take action at general assembly;
Georgia Guidestones, long treasured and feared, demolished after attack

IN REVIEW

- 36 Books**
Richard Lischer: *South to America*, by Imani Perry
Philip Jenkins: *Heathen*, by Kathryn Gin Lum
Philip C. Kolin: *All That Will Be New*, by Paul Mariani

COLUMNS

- 3 From the Editor/Publisher**
Peter W. Marty: Foundational texts
- 20, 21 Living by the Word**
Craig S. Keener
- 35 Faith Matters**
Debie Thomas: Resurrecting heaven
- 44 Screen Time**
Kathryn Reklis: Scales of time
- 47 On Art**
John Kohan: *Jesus Said to Her: "Give Me to Drink,"*
by Rania Kuhn

POETRY

- 10 Spencer Clark French:** Oh, little moth of clarity
- 28 Charles Hughes:** At twilight
- 33 Jacob Stratman:** On grace in late August

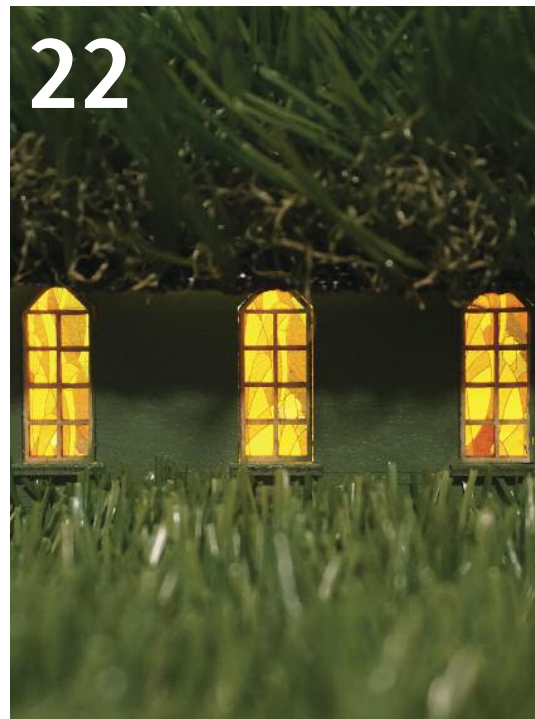
SUBSCRIPTIONS & CUSTOMER SERVICE: Tel.: 800-208-4097. Email: christiancentury@cambeywest.com. The CHRISTIAN CENTURY, P.O. Box 429, Congers, NY 10920-0429. Fax: 845-267-3478. Subscriptions \$65 per year; \$105 Canadian; \$125 other foreign. Online-only subscriptions available at christiancentury.org: \$2.95 for four weeks; \$24.95 for six months; \$39.95 for 12 months.

EDITORIAL OFFICE: General queries to main@christiancentury.org; 312-263-7510. Letters to the editor: letters@christiancentury.org or the CHRISTIAN CENTURY, Attn: Letters to the Editor, 104 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1100, Chicago, IL 60603. For information on rights & permissions, submissions guidelines, advertising information, letters to the editor: christiancentury.org/contact.

Established 1884. Renamed the CHRISTIAN CENTURY 1900. Copyright © 2022 by the CHRISTIAN CENTURY. All rights reserved under the International Copyright Union, Universal Copyright Convention, and Pan-American Copyright Convention.

The CHRISTIAN CENTURY (ISSN 0009-5281) is published biweekly at 104 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1100, Chicago IL 60603. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Product (Canadian Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 1406523. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHRISTIAN CENTURY, P.O. Box 429, Congers, NY 10920-0429.

22



26



30



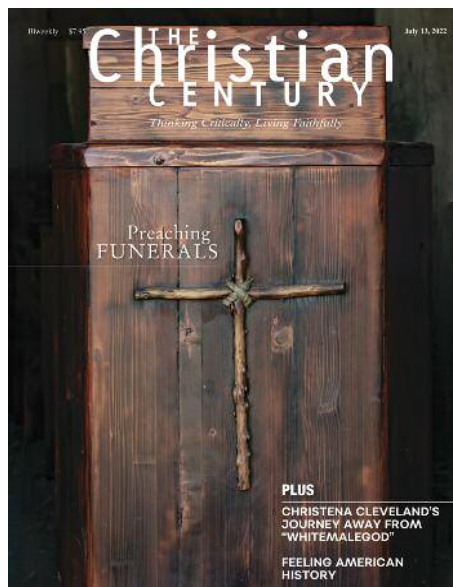
Preaching at funerals

There is so much to affirm in Thomas Steagald's call to preach the resurrection at funerals ("The distant triumph song," July 13). His examples moved me to a profound "Amen!" Clearly, "celebrations of life" don't work very well when a child dies or an adult is cut down in the prime of life by disease, accident, violence, or suicide. In such situations, Steagald makes a strong case for the traditional gospel: that God has acted in Jesus to embrace our suffering, however unjust or tragic, as God's own, and in the face of it, to work the miracle of resurrection not only for Jesus, but also for us.

But what about those for whom the resurrection is as mythical as the Elysian fields? Those whose belief in their own inherently immortal soul renders the notion of resurrection crude and unnecessary? Or those who wonder about the people who lived before God's action in Jesus to make life after death possible? Or those who understand the resurrection not as proof of life after death in general, but as the specific vindication of those who live Jesus' way of radically inclusive, unconditional love: that is, that in such love they already have 'eternal life' now, whether or not they continue existing in some afterlife? When such as these are sitting in the pews of the church or funeral chapel, what gospel do we preach to them?

*John A. Wright
Austin, TX*

Roger Owens's article ("The whole truth?," July 13) reminded me of the officious know-it-all and neighborhood busybody from my childhood who asked me to officiate her funeral. I agreed because I knew there was more to her than those characteristics and because I believe funerals are witnesses to the resurrection rather than celebrations of life. When the time came and her son asked me to do the service, I told him I would but that I would feel obligat-



ed to acknowledge she had been a difficult person. He responded tearfully, "Oh, please do." I am convinced that healing began for him at that moment, previewing the response of his family and others who heard the good news that God's grace is a gift for us all.

*Alvin Turner
Arvada, CO*

My mother suffered from mental illness. Her relationships with everyone—including me and my father—were affected. My uncle gave a eulogy at my mother's service, and his message was a balance between the moments in which we saw glimpses of grace and the reality of hurt that we'd all experienced. The sermon painted a large portrait of the complexity of human relationships and the great depth of God's love. I was grateful for his honesty.

*Dorothy Wells
Facebook*

Emotions of history . . .

I am grateful for Amy Frykholm's article ("Feeling history," July 13). Growing up in an overly emotive de-

nomination, I learned at a young age to try to control my feelings. I had few friends and turned to being an avid reader. Frykholm felt she escaped into books; I probably escaped there, too.

My father, an air force pilot, was posted in Montgomery, Alabama, in the mid-1950s. We were there when Rosa Parks was arrested, and I quickly realized how different it was from my native New York. It was 90 years after the Civil War, but there was enough vitriol and animosity about the losses suffered in that war and its aftermath to baffle this young White Yankee.

Even today as a pastor in the South, I find people's reactions to racism and other social issues difficult to explain. I preach about systemic sin as something so prevalent we don't even see it. "What do you mean?" people ask me. When I explain that we don't naturally understand race, gender, and age except from our own social locations, they don't immediately throw me out—but they quickly and thoroughly point out that they aren't racist.

That's why I am grateful for Frykholm's reminder to feel history. One can be rational all one wants, but perhaps sharing feelings will better tell the story than trying to explain it. After all these years, if people can't admit any feeling for those so wounded by the social apparatus, I'm not sure when we will be able to face history.

*Robert Turk
Fort Worth, TX*

Amy Frykholm's thought-provoking article about the teaching of history drew my attention to the disingenuousness of politicians who claim to care about children's feelings. If they actually cared about kids' emotional well-being, they would be ardent supporters of gun control legislation as a means to reduce the fear and terror generated in schoolchildren everywhere when they hear of mass shootings in schools.

*Robert D. Baker
Rochester, NY*

Small acts, big signs

August 10, 2022

There have been two heavy blows to climate change action in the United States in recent weeks. In *West Virginia v. EPA*, the Supreme Court handed down a devastating decision that weakens the executive branch's ability to address climate change. In its 6–3 ruling, the court eliminated the EPA's authority to direct electric utilities to shut down coal-fired power plants in favor of wind, solar, and other renewable forms of energy. Weeks later, Joe Manchin—a Democratic senator from West Virginia who has profited significantly from the coal industry in recent years—killed a promising congressional climate policy plan, citing inflation.

These two moments have wide-reaching consequences. For those who recognize the need for swift and large-scale action on climate change, the outcome could hardly be worse. Congressional, judicial, and executive tools that might guide the US's response to climate change remain in the toolbox, unused. It's enough to make a person feel hopeless.

In this issue, Anna Woofenden writes about green churches, focusing on small steps that congregations are taking to create their own responses to climate change (see “Thinking big (and small),” p. 22). It's hard not to wonder: What's the point? We aren't going to solve climate change with light bulbs and solar panels.

That's a question worth taking seriously, and it has long been important for Christians. One answer lies in the distinction, often made in L'Arche communities, between being a sign and being a solution. Churches, like all intentional communities, are called to be signs. We cannot solve world hunger, but we understand that when we feed hungry people we signal our belief that a better way is possible. We can't solve child sex trafficking, but we understand that when we welcome vulnerable refugees we participate in God's vision. We do these things out of love and for the sake of love. Scalability, in the teachings of Jesus, is never the primary concern.

The same is true of the ways the climate crisis calls us to act. We have struggled to show our love for the planet, for its air and water and plants and trees. We have struggled to acknowledge our indebtedness to nature. The Christian tradition has been slow to understand that love of the planet is as vital and compelling as love of neighbor. But indeed, both are the same love.

As a sign, we point toward what we know is God's way: a gentler, more connected, more whole way. As a sign, we proclaim God's redemptive work. As a sign, we consider the resources we have right here, right now. As a sign, we move away from end-times thinking and disaster-oriented models and toward our belief in God's alternative vision—a reality in which we participate by faith.

In *Practically Divine*, Episcopal priest Becca Stevens writes, “The bravest thing we can do in this world is not cling to old ideas or fear of judgment, but step out and just do something for love's sake.” Each act we take against climate change, however small, is an act of love.

What's the point? We aren't going to solve climate change with light bulbs and solar panels.

—The Editors

CENTURY marks

PR JURISPRUDENCE: The “three Es”—environment, energy, and the economy—should have equal weight, said a PR representative for chemical manufacturers in the 1970s. E. Bruce Harrison’s goal, after he failed to vilify *Silent Spring* author Rachel Carson as a communist, was to make polluting industries look reasonable and suggest that environmentalists were trying to destroy the economy. His strategy, deployed through grassroots and media campaigns and testimony at regulatory hearings, was so successful that it played a role in July’s Supreme Court decision on *West Virginia v. EPA*, which relied on a vague doctrine that federal agencies cannot make decisions of wide “economic and political significance” unless authorized by Congress (*Grist*, July 6).

RELIGIOUS GRIEVANCE: The man suspected of assassinating former

Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe said he did so because Abe had promoted a religious group to which his mother had donated a huge amount of money, resulting in her bankruptcy. The Unification Church, founded in South Korea by Sun Myung Moon and long accused of being a cult with murky financial practices, confirmed that the suspect’s mother was a member but declined to comment on her donations. Abe had expressed support for the Unification Church’s peace activism and had sent messages of support to church-affiliated events (Reuters, July 11).

DECISION MAKERS: For the first time, the Vatican has appointed three women—two religious sisters and one lay woman—to the office that vets nominations for new bishops. While the pope still makes the final call, these appointments are significant for giving

women a rare voice in important decisions in the Church. Eleven men were also appointed (*National Catholic Reporter*, July 13).

DEBT PROTECTION: While typically thought of as a tool for rich people to protect their assets, prenuptial agreements are becoming more widely popular. One survey found that 12 years ago, 3 percent of respondents signed a prenup. Today, that number is 15 percent. Moreover, nearly 40 percent of married and engaged people between the ages of 18 and 34 have signed or will sign prenups. One likely reason for this trend is that young Americans are in more debt than ever before and want to protect their spouses from incurring their debt (*New Yorker*, July 12).

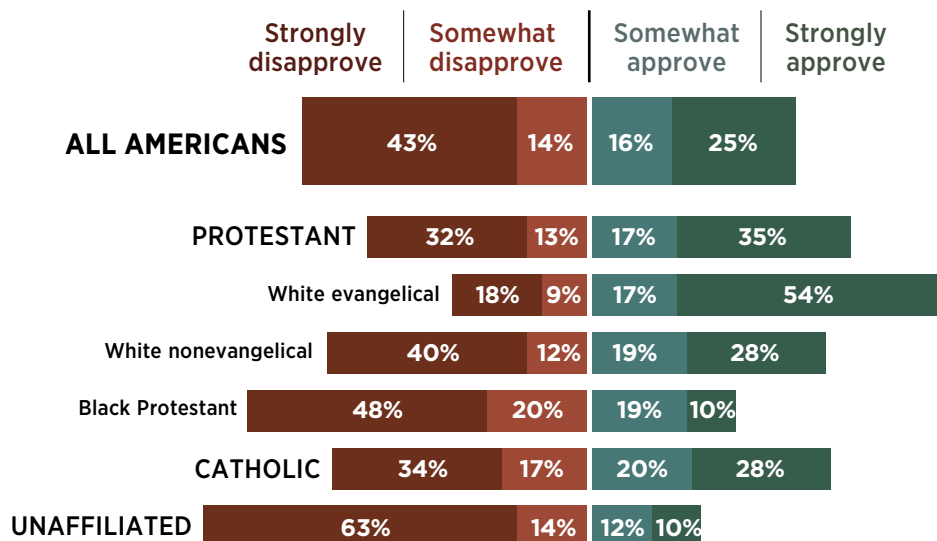
TURKEY NO MORE: The nation of Turkey has asked to be officially recognized by the United Nations as Türkiye (tur-key-YAY), as it is spelled and pronounced in Turkish. The country is going through an extensive rebranding process to separate itself from its Anglicized name. Turkey’s English-language state broadcaster TRT World explained the change by saying that when you Google the word *Turkey*, you get “a muddled set of images, articles, and dictionary definitions that conflate the country with Meleagris—otherwise known as the turkey, a large bird native to North America—which is famous for being served on Christmas menus or Thanksgiving dinners” (*Guardian*, June 2).

THE™: Ohio State University’s bid to trademark “THE” was finally approved by the US Patent and Trademark Office in June. Since 1878, “The” has been an official part of the universi-

VIEWS ON *DOBBS*

SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER
SURVEY OF US ADULTS CONDUCTED JUNE 27–JULY 4, 2022

Percentage of Americans who _____ of the US Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, allowing states to set abortion laws



ty's name, and "THE," a rallying cry for Buckeye fans and athletes, has been a fixture of the school's branded products. The university took action to protect "THE" after fashion designer Marc Jacobs applied to trademark the word on a sweater in May 2019. James Boyle, a professor at Duke and author, with Jennifer Jenkins, of "Mark of the Devil: The University as Brand Bully," observed, "This is a very stupid decision . . . absolutely absurd" (Bloomberg, June 22, and *Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 23).

VIOLENCE OFF CAMERA: Delia Owens, author of the 2018 novel *Where the Crawdads Sing*, which has been turned into a feature film released in July 2022, is wanted for questioning related to the killing of an alleged poacher in Zambia in 1995. A 1996 ABC News documentary about American conservationists Owens and her husband, Mark, featured a scene in which one unidentified person is shot and killed by another off camera. Delia, Mark, and Mark's son Christopher Owens are all wanted for questioning in Zambia, which has no statute of limitations on murder, for the killing and for other possible criminal activities. Delia Owens has denied having any involvement in the death (*Atlantic*, July 11).

LOSING A LIBRARY: A public library in Vinton, Iowa, a small town about 40 miles north of Cedar Rapids, has closed because so many staff quit after facing complaints and harassment from community members about LGBTQ employees and the display of LGBTQ-related titles. Of nearly 5,800 materials in the children's section, seven books were labeled LGBTQ or related, while 173 of the books had Christian themes. Former library director Janette McMahon said the attacks became personal and she no longer felt comfortable living in the community (*Iowa Starting Line*, July 13).

BOOK BOOM: Despite fears of a blow to the industry, booksellers not only survived the pandemic, but many are thriving. More than 300 new independent bookstores have opened across the

“The universe is not only logical, it is also beautiful. This is God’s creation being revealed to us, and in it we can see both his astonishing power and his love of beauty.”

— **Guy Consolmagno, SJ**, director of the Vatican Observatory, on the images from the Webb Telescope (RNS, July 14)

“I honestly don’t know how he is going to look his own grandchildren in the eyes.”

— **Leah Stokes**, an environmental policy expert who has advised congressional Democrats on climate legislation, on Joe Manchin’s refusal to support climate legislation (*New York Times*, July 15)

“Each member of Congress, every single one of them, has, I’m sure, lived through fairly traumatic times in their lives and also chaos in the country. But every member of Congress has also seen America at its best . . . when we’ve all come together. That is something that Gen Z has not had.”

— **John Della Volpe**, who studies young people’s opinions as the director of polling at the Harvard Kennedy School Institute of Politics (*New York Times*, July 14)

“The church has precisely abandoned its own commitments to the cessation of violence and instead has learned that killing for Jesus is bad, but killing for the nation-state is okey dokey, that it’s in very bad taste to even proselytize on behalf of Jesus, but we think nothing of slaughtering other people on behalf of the flag.”

— **William T. Cavanaugh**, theologian and ethicist, in an interview with Wipf and Stock Publishers (W&S Blog, July 11)

United States in the last two years, and as the number of stores has grown, book selling has become more diverse. Many of the new stores are run by non-White booksellers specializing in books by and about their specific communities, increasing representation in categories not usually found on the shelves. Several new owners said they were motivated by a desire to create more visibility for diverse books and authors (*New York Times*, July 10).

GIVE ME A SIGN: During the pandemic, an anonymous artist began traveling the country, installing highway

signs featuring poems instead of directions. The large rectangular signs are the standard-issue cobalt blue, with a white border and white lettering, but instead of travel information they feature senryu poems—a form, like haiku, of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables. *Remember the time / Sitting by so much water / When we all just laughed* reads one sign in Minnesota. The artist said the Roadside Senryu project, which was completed after the installation of 23 (unauthorized) signs throughout the country, was intended to let people know that they weren’t alone in their fear and isolation (*Outside*, July 8).

Tough choices in Karlsruhe

by Ross M. Allen

ECUMENISM, the goal of visible unity among the world's Christians, seems ever more elusive in our fragmented and fragmenting world. The barriers to a putative "common faith" involve a long-standing intra-Christian debate: How should the faithful relate to modernity and the general posture of cultural liberalism that has come with it? Supporters of the ecumenical movement that birthed the World Council of Churches in 1948 have generally taken a comparatively positive view of modernity and cultural change; many member churches, for instance, ordain women and officiate weddings for same-sex couples.

Such questions of culture and sexual

ethics are important in their own right. Often, however, they are engaged as proxies for other conflicts.

A recent example involves Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church and his justification of Russia's attack on Ukraine as a kind of holy war against the infiltrating decadence of the West, a decadence evinced, he claims, by pride parades that took place in the Donbas region prior to the pandemic. There is a struggle for the soul of the Eastern churches that, by Kirill's reckoning, constitutes a metaphysical battle. Russia is bound by God, he insists, to win this battle. A truer story, of course, would account for Russian president Vladimir Putin's attempt to

regain geopolitical dominance—and for the ROC's attempt to claim a portion of the Putin regime's power.

Leaders of other communions are increasingly prepared to name Kirill's efforts to baptize an unjust war as jingoistic and unchristian. Some, including former archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, have gone so far as to say that this warrants the ROC's removal from the WCC. Complicating things is the reality that the ROC is the largest single church officially represented in the WCC. Its nearly 114 million members make up roughly a quarter of the council's total constituency.

All this will come to a head on August 31 when the WCC's 11th global assembly begins in Karlsruhe, Germany. There are no easy answers as to how to proceed. The WCC can continue to allow the ROC its membership—a de facto legitimization of Kirill's spiritual authority even as he makes his church lackey to a murderous autocrat. Or it can expel the church—and thus reinforce Kirill's antagonistic narrative that the liberalism of Western Christians is antithetical to Orthodoxy itself, thereby deepening the divide within that tradition in a way that empowers ultraconservative isolationists. This divide is already punctuated by the fact that the outgoing general secretary of the WCC is Ioan Sauca, a Romanian Orthodox priest who is amicable to the West.

If there was a glimmer of hope in this situation, it has been all but extinguished in recent weeks. That glimmer emanated from within the Russian Orthodox delegation to the general assembly. As of early June, that delegation was set to be headed by Metropolitan

Oh, little moth of clarity

Oh, little moth of clarity,
why do you now hide?
In the past I knew you well—
devouring every disguise,
gnawing my closet to shambles,
exposing the bones inside:

every truth I feared fully clarified.

I should tout your truancy
or revel your retreat.
Yet, for some reason,
I've set out lamp tonight.
Little probing, perforating brother,
please, please,

take flight.

Spencer Clark French

Spencer Clark French is a graduate student at the University of Notre Dame.



PHOTO BY JÜRGEN RÖSNER / CREATIVE COMMONS

The courtyard at Messe Karlsruhe, in Germany, site of the 11th assembly of the World Council of Churches, which begins August 31.


Hilarion (Alfeyev), the religious leader who was recently removed from his position as head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Relations—the main ecumenical body of the ROC—and from the permanent seat on the main ROC governing body that came with it. Hilarion, just 55, had held that post since 2009. His immediate predecessor was the future Patriarch Kirill, and before Hilarion was deposed it was widely

WCC and its robust engagement with the West. He served on the executive and central committees of the WCC and on the presidium of its Faith and Order Commission, which undertakes collective theological studies toward the end of uniting the churches of the world in common life, and he is said to have developed a personal relationship with the last two popes.

On the other hand, Hilarion has also spoken out publicly against both same-

sex marriage and the ordination of women as bishops in the Anglican Communion. More damningly, he defended his country's persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses, claiming that adherents of that tradition "erode the psyche of the people and the family."

he was "doing everything possible to help those in need and to end the conflict." The fact that he has been removed from his position of authority in the ROC adds credibility to his claim, but it paints a grim picture for the future of ecumenical relations with that body. Hilarion's replacement is the far less renowned Metropolitan Anthony (Sevryuk), a Kirill loyalist who served as the patriarch's private secretary before his accelerated ascent through the ranks of church leadership. (He became a bishop at age 31 in 2015.) The young cleric is infamous in ecumenical circles for having discouraged Catholic and Orthodox Christians from attending one another's masses—or even so much as praying together—which bodes ill for his future working relationship with other churches in the WCC.

It's not clear how Anthony will use his bully pulpit at the general assembly; after all, he may or may not be poised to withdraw his church from the WCC altogether. Much hangs in the balance—primarily for the Ukrainians whose lives remain threatened by Russia's criminal war, but also for global ecumenism. There is every reason to expect the worst. 

Ross M. Allen, a former campus minister, is an editorial intern at the CENTURY, and a graduate student at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Patriarch Kirill's support for Putin's war is straining global ecumenism.

assumed that he was being groomed to succeed Kirill as patriarch.

The Oxford-trained Hilarion has been called a polymath. He has been published more than 600 times and is celebrated in Russia as both a theologian and a historian. He is a classical composer who has written multiple grand oratorios, one of which was performed on a tour through the United States. He also had a promising career in the Russian military before leaving to become a monk in 1987.

Prior to his dismissal, Hilarion also maintained an important liminal, if illiberal, space in the ecumenical landscape. On the one hand, he was a staunch advocate of both his church's membership in the

sex marriage and the ordination of women as bishops in the Anglican Communion. More damningly, he defended his country's persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses, claiming that adherents of that tradition "erode the psyche of the people and the family."

All this notwithstanding, many were initially surprised and thankful when he spoke out against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He was subsequently silent about the war for a time, a stance which cost him yet another concurrently held prestigious post, this one in the theology faculty at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. In an official communication responding to that dismissal Hilarion claimed that, behind the scenes,

The pastoral calling to help people mourn

Mountains of grief

by Neal Plantinga

CHRISTIAN PASTORS are more than acquainted with grief. They're steeped in it. First responders and emergency room personnel meet grief that accompanies trauma, but they don't usually have to minister to it. Pastors do. Their day job is to weep with those who weep.

And not just when a congregant gets injured or dies. Grief arises from a host of causes. People grieve job loss, with all its anxieties. They lament their poverty. They grieve over the diminishments of aging, over their poor judgment that led to a tragic mistake, over family estrangements. They grieve over the disturbance or loss of their faith—often itself caused by grief. Congregants rejoice when their child graduates or gets married, but they also grieve because while we want our children to grow, when they do grow we ache. Some folks lament a normalcy they never had: “I so wish I had loved my mother and that she had loved me.” A fair number of congregants feel sad that their lives haven't turned out as they had hoped. Their lives seem to them flat and insignificant, a wounding rebuke of their youthful dreams.

These are only some of the familiar personal griefs, and they are bad enough. If you add trouble in church, trouble on the job, trouble with neighborhood bigotry, and trouble in a bitterly divided nation, you get a small mountain of grief. And people have trouble getting over it.

For a week in high summer, 20 of us pastors from seven denominations, 12 states, and two Canadian provinces gathered to discuss how pastors deal with grief, including our own. With a couple of exceptions, we had never met one another before. Yet within a day or two we

achieved a unity that melted away denominational, geographic, and theological differences. We were united in knowing grief as pastors.

We wanted to know not only what causes grief but also how to help the grieving—what to say, what not to say, what to do, how often to do it, when to stop. We discussed certain days of worship—Christmas, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Thanksgiving—when the wounded

responsibilities the grieving may be too numb to tackle.

What to say to the grieving? Again, not much. (One of the pastors observed that before Job's friends tried to explain his suffering to him, they did him the most good when they sat in silence with him for seven days.) A little can be said. “I'm so sorry.” “How are you doing?” “How are your loved ones?” And, in the case of bereavement, “Here is what I so

For a week in high summer, 20 pastors gathered to discuss what it means to weep with those who weep.

are especially vulnerable. We wanted to know how to embrace the grieving in public worship, how to think of Jesus Christ as the ultimate wounded healer, how to minister to ourselves when the congregation's grief overwhelms and sickens us.

How to help the grieving? Sit with them. Absorb their grief. Weep with them. Remember that close attention is vivifying. It's a form of love, and love brings life. That's why we embrace each other at funerals. We can't bring back the deceased, but we may be able to bring back the bereaved, at least in part.

Encourage a church culture of care for the grieving—let the church organize to bring meals, run errands, do chores. Much of this can be done without saying a lot. Simple loving presence is a staple of grief care. So is a gentle touch. So is thoughtful assistance with the daily

treasured in them.” Anything more is a risk. Even “God be with you” is risky. The griever may be angry with God and allergic to closeness with God.

In the seminar, participants told their stories of grieving congregants and of how they attempted to help. One pastor told of being called to a home where a distraught 17-year-old boy had just shot himself through the temple. The house was nearby, and the pastor arrived so quickly that the smell of gun smoke was still in the air. He remarked that too many folks suppose that a pastor's job is quiet and contemplative, away from the action. But no, in the house he visited that night it was all wailing and gun smoke.

Another pastor told of a person who had taken a loss in her family, and of how a loving congregation wanted to do all the right things—to sit with her, weep with her, share the burden of her loss. But what she really wanted was to be

alone for a while, to be apart, to be untended. And the pastor concluded that she was no longer going to assume she knew the best way to help a grieving person and that she would therefore ask things like, “What hurts the most?” and “How may I best help you?”

Occasionally, congregants may ask a pastor for advice in extreme circumstances. They are dying, they are suffering great pain and grieving over it, they have no prospect of recovery, and they have hoarded enough Demerol to put themselves out of their misery. “What do you think?” they ask their pastor. Here, in our discussion, one experienced pastor said that he won’t bite on a question like this. The congregant is trying to pass to the pastor a life-and-death decision that belongs to the congregant, and wise pastors won’t take the bait. They may help the congregant spiritually weigh the options before them, and they may try to slow down the congregant’s movement toward a simple answer to an agonizing question. In any event, they will not accept transfer of the decision.

Has the pastor wisely preserved the congregant’s own moral responsibility or merely withheld pastoral counsel the congregant is hungering for? This, as Boethius said in pondering the mystery of the Holy Trinity, “deserves a moment’s consideration.”

How may we minister to the grieving around Thanksgiving or Christmas? Perhaps by remembering them in sermons or prayers, acknowledging that they are not able to celebrate as they might wish—that our own celebration feels foreign to them. And yet we do celebrate. Joy and grief do not cancel each other out. As Kate Bowler says, “Life is so beautiful. Life is so hard.”

How about Mother’s Day and Father’s Day? Pastors sometimes flinch at honoring these Sundays promoted by candy, flower, and greeting card companies but also feel they can’t ignore them. Parents need to be acknowledged—but so do the grieving. Perhaps they never knew their father, or they did and he abused them. Maybe they never loved their censorious mother. Or they would like to be a mother but can’t conceive, or

they are the father of children who ignore them. These may be some of the currents in the congregation, and pastors have to navigate them.

Where is God in all this? Christians vary in response to the question. Some find God a steady comfort. In fact, some find they are never closer to God than in their experience of grief. But some are like C. S. Lewis. A resolute believer, Lewis suffered the loss of his wife, Joy Davidman, and turned to God. “When your need is desperate,” he writes in *A Grief Observed*, “when all other help is in vain, what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence.” Lewis later came to terms with God, but his idea of God had been rendered forever more complex.

In the seminar, we pastors naturally turned to the cross of Jesus Christ as the Christian’s greatest grief and comfort. Our greatest grief because we human beings killed our Savior. Our greatest comfort too, but not because the cross explains our suffering. It’s not as if we look at the cross of Christ and say, “Now, at last, I understand my wife’s throat cancer.” The cross explains very little along these lines. No, we look to the cross of Jesus Christ as a comfort because we see

in it that where our suffering is concerned, God is not aloof. God enters into it, absorbs the worst of it without passing it back, and so cuts the otherwise inevitable loop of vengeance.

Finally, in dealing with grief, the pastors at the seminar agreed that caring for ourselves is essential to thriving—even to surviving. Absorbing people’s grief takes a toll not only on our spirits but also on our bodies—and on our relationships with loved ones. Pastors dealing with grief need not only healthy prayer, sabbath, and exercise routines but also professional therapeutic support—a counselor, a mentor, a spiritual director, someone on whom to offload some of what threatens to crack us. Pastors need their congregational leaders’ support too—perhaps to pay for regular therapy for the pastor and to thwart any congregational suggestion that the need for therapy is a weakness.

It’s not. It’s a necessity. In a difficult role, pastors need all the help they can get to achieve balance and wholeness in their lives. Only then can they, in turn, bring a comforting presence to the grieving.

CC

Neal Plantinga is senior research fellow at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

ILLUSTRATION © SOLARSEVEN / ISTOCK / GETTY



Faith leaders attend celebration of gun control law

Faith leaders from a wide range of traditions, including those whose houses of worship have been attacked, were at the White House on July 11 as members of Congress and other gun control advocates gathered for a White House celebration of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, signed into law June 25.

Mike McBride, the leader of Live Free USA, who has long sought political support to help the nation's urban centers, hailed the signing as an opportunity to address gun violence deaths that do not always make national headlines.

"It's been a very difficult task to get the death of Black men in this country, much less the death of any Black folks, to receive national attention and intervention," said McBride. "Even among Democrats—Democrats have not been the most political champions for this work. So it's taken us ten years to get to \$250 million committed in a bipartisan way."

On hand were Jonathan Perlman and others who endured a mass shooting in 2018 at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and Sharon Risher, whose mother was among the nine African American worshipers killed during the 2015 shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

"That was beautiful—to see all these heroic people, survivors that have been working for change," said Shane Claiborne, cofounder of the group Red Letter Christians and leader of an effort that melts down guns into garden tools in observance of the biblical call to turn swords into plowshares.

Claiborne added that he understood that the bipartisan legislation "is the most substantial gun reform bill that we've seen in 30 years. But what we also

heard is how dysfunctional our political process is—because there's so much more that's needed."

"We need a ban on assault rifles," he added.

The legislation includes a variety of interventions into gun purchasing, including expansion of background checks for people under the age of 21, \$250 million for community-based violence prevention initiatives, and \$500 million to increase the number of mental health staffers in school districts.

President Joe Biden, in remarks from the White House's South Lawn, decried the violence that has turned houses of worship, schools, nightclubs, and stores into places of death.

"Neighborhoods and streets have been turned into killing fields as well," said the president. "Will we match thoughts and prayers with action? I say

yes. And that's what we're doing here today."

Claiborne said he presented a Christian cross made from a melted-down gun barrel to Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff, as well as to a friend of President Biden.

McBride said his efforts with faith leaders on this issue date back to a 2013 meeting at the Obama White House, when Biden was vice president.

"In 2013, we asked for \$300 million, and we were told no," he recalled. "And so some ten years later, we've gotten close to that original ask."

He said the programs for which groups like Fund Peace seek support are "targeted for Black and Brown communities that are dealing with the highest rates of gun violence," including violence by gangs and intimate partners.



NEW LEGISLATION: Audience members listen as President Joe Biden speaks during an event to celebrate the passage of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, a law meant to reduce gun violence, at the White House on July 11.

AP PHOTO / EVAN VUCCI



AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE: *Shane Clairborne (left) and Sharon Risher—whose mother was killed at Mother Emanuel AME in 2015—at the White House on July 11.*

Other faith groups have responded to the passage of the legislation with statements of support.

“The investments in mental health services and reasonable measures to regulate guns included in this bill are positive initial steps towards confronting a culture of violence,” said Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

“We are heartened that after almost three decades of gridlock, Congress has finally taken bipartisan action to address America’s gun violence epidemic and end violent crime,” said Melanie Roth Gorelick, senior vice president of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. “This is a huge victory, but we cannot allow this to be the end.”

While calling himself grateful for this historic development, McBride said he and his partners will be pushing for far more support.

“This will be a failure if this is the only thing they do for the next few years,” he said.

Biden seemed to agree that further action was needed.

“We have so much more work to do,” he concluded. “May God bless all of us with the strength to finish the work left undone, and on behalf of the lives we’ve lost and the lives we can save, may God bless you all.” —Adelle M. Banks and Jack Jenkins, Religion News Service

Episcopal general convention focuses on racism, justice issues

The 80th General Convention of the Episcopal Church—postponed a year because of COVID-19—conducted what Presiding Bishop Michael Curry had referred to during the planning process as “matters essential for the governance and good order of the church.”

Among those essential actions, the bishops and deputies approved the first reading of a constitutional change to clearly define the Book of Common Prayer and continued the church’s commitment to reckoning with its history of racism.

The convention adopted a balanced \$100.5 million church-wide budget, and much of the new spending in the budget was tied to resolutions related to addressing racism. Central among them was Resolution A125, for which the budget includes \$400,000 in start-up funds for a new Episcopal Coalition for Racial Equity and Justice.

The budget plan also includes spending \$225,000 on research to confront the Episcopal Church’s historic ties to the federal system of Indigenous boarding schools, as outlined in Resolution A127. Resolution A086 allocates money toward the development of programs

that respond to eco-justice concerns, address environmental racism, and work to alleviate environmental burdens on Indigenous communities.

The convention approved the first reading of a constitutional change to define the Book of Common Prayer. If the change passes a second reading at the next general convention in 2024, the Book of Common Prayer would be defined as “those liturgical forms and other texts authorized by the General Convention.” In other words, liturgies that are not in the current prayer book—such as same-sex marriage rites and gender-expansive liturgies—could be elevated to “prayer book status.”

For the first time in history, two women will lead the House of Deputies.

Oklahoma lay deputy Julia Ayala Harris was elected president on July 9. Ayala Harris is the first Latina and the youngest person elected to lead the house. Deputies elected Rachel Taber-Hamilton as vice president the following day. Taber-Hamilton, who is Shackan First Nation, is the first Indigenous and first ordained woman to serve as vice president.

Ayala Harris and Taber-Hamilton are the first people of color serving together as leaders of the House of Deputies.

The bishops and deputies also took a stand on several social justice issues.

The convention passed a resolution “affirming that all Episcopalians should be able to access abortion services and



LOOKING AHEAD: *Gay Clark Jennings, whose term as president of the House of Deputies ended on July 11, and Presiding Bishop Michael Curry listen during the convention’s budget presentation.*

birth control with no restriction on movement, autonomy, type, or timing.”

The convention also adopted resolutions to offer paid family leave and health insurance to lay and clergy church employees through the Denominational Health Plan. The convention

spoke out against gun violence, passing resolutions on ghost guns, urging advocacy for state legislation against gun violence, and commending investment in community violence intervention to prevent gun violence.

COVID-19 hovered over the gather-

ing. About 1,200 people attended—typically as many as 10,000 people participate—and they had to provide proof of vaccination and conduct rapid tests in their hotel rooms each morning. All participants received five test kits the day they registered at the Baltimore Convention Center. They had to wear masks indoors and there was no exhibit hall, a space typically filled with displays from vendors and Episcopal-related ministries.

By the end of the convention, there were 32 reported COVID-19 infections, according to Rodney Coldren, who served as public health adviser to the House of Deputies.

“COVID-19 is doing exactly what it does: it multiplies,” he told the House of Deputies the morning of July 11.

He added that, using a conservative model, he would have expected 76 cases if protective measures such as masking and daily self-testing had not been taken.

“Know that what you have done really has protected your fellow deputies,” he said. —Mary Francis Schjonberg, Episcopal News Service

Presbyterians take action at general assembly

AT THE 225th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), held from June 18 to July 9 at the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, Kentucky, the following actions were taken:

Fossil fuel divestment

The general assembly approved ENV-10 calling for divestment from five oil and gas companies: Chevron, ExxonMobil, Marathon Petroleum, Phillips 66, and Valero Energy. The assembly said the companies were not doing enough to slow global warming. Presbyterian Committee for Mission Responsibility through Investment reports that this is the first time the PC(USA) has voted to divest from companies out of compliance with the general assembly’s environmental policies, which were established in 2018.

Gun violence

The general assembly approved a motion that the church renew its commitment to end gun violence by developing a ten-year campaign, the Decade to End Gun Violence. The assembly also voted to direct Mission Responsibility through Investment to engage with Walmart, Dick’s Sporting Goods, and Kroger—three publicly traded companies held by either the Board of Pensions or Presbyterian Foundation that sell guns not classified as semiautomatic or assault-based weapons.

Immigration and sanctuary status

By a vote of 340–25, the general assembly approved IMM-06, allowing the PC(USA) to declare itself a “Sanctuary and Accompaniment Church.” The assembly’s Immigration Committee says the decision sends a message that the

PC(USA) is committed to working for justice in US immigration policy.

Israel/Palestine

The general assembly voted 266–116 to approve INT-02, “On Recognition that Israel’s Laws, Policies, and Practices Constitute Apartheid against the Palestinian People.” It declares that the PC(USA) recognizes “that the government of Israel’s laws, policies, and practices regarding the Palestinian people fulfill the international legal definition of apartheid.”

Race and gender justice

Commissioners and advisory delegates approved several items of business from the Race and Gender Justice Committee, including RGJ-07, which addresses the lack of installed pastoral leadership in congregations of color, and RGJ-08, which offers African Americans an apology for the “sin of slavery” and its legacy.

The assembly also approved RGJ-12, which calls for a new special committee to expose White supremacy within the denomination and make recommendations for improvement.

In addition, the assembly approved RGJ-13, directing the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation to “create educational resources for congregations to identify and interrupt practices and policies that perpetuate the adultification of Black girls and criminalization of adolescent behavior.”

Commissioners and advisory delegates passed a resolution, RGJ-14, denouncing violence against Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. —Presbyterian News Service

Georgia Guidestones, long treasured and feared, demolished after attack

After 42 years, the mysterious Georgia Guidestones, often called America’s Stonehenge, are no longer casting a shadow in rural Elbert County, Georgia. Early on July 5, one of the six slabs of granite making up a primitive-looking monument was destroyed by what the Georgia Bureau of Investigation believes was an explosive.

The remaining stones were removed the next day after officials determined they were unstable.

The guidestones stood for more than 40 years among fields seven miles outside of the small town of Elberton. For decades they’ve been a source of inspiration, fear, and curiosity. Hand-carved words across the nearly 20-foot-tall slabs brought discomfort and debate.

In 1979, Joe Fendley, president of the Elberton Granite Finishing Co., was

asked to create the monument by someone known by the pseudonym Robert C. Christian (later R. C. Christian), who claimed to represent a group of concerned Americans.

The stone structure was revealed to the public on the spring equinox in 1980. Together, the 951 cubic feet of granite weighed 237,746 pounds. The center slab was surrounded by four standing stones of similar height, and the entire structure was capped by a sixth stone 6½ feet wide, 10 feet long, and 7 inches thick.

The impressive size of the structure was only part of its allure. Carved on each of the four outer slabs were ten precepts—a message to humanity—repeated in English, Spanish, Swahili, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Hebrew, Russian, and Arabic. Translators from the United Nations assisted Christian with the translations.

Inscribed on the capstone was the phrase “Let these be guidestones to an Age of Reason,” written in ancient Greek, Egyptian hieroglyphs, Sanskrit, and Babylonian cuneiform.

The center slab and capstone also served as an astrological calendar, with carefully cut holes for observance of the moon, sun, and North Star. Astronomers from the University of Georgia assisted in refining this part of the project.

While Christian’s identity is still a mystery, his purpose is not.

Created during the Cold War, when a nuclear holocaust felt like a real threat, the stones were intended to be a beacon for those who survive.

According to local historian Raymond Wiley, coauthor of the book *The Georgia Guidestones: America’s Most Mysterious Monument*, Christian wanted to prevent humanity from returning to the “bleak place” it was in. The precepts are a prescription for a peaceful world.

Despite Christian’s declaration of purpose, conspiracy theories arose almost immediately. “People bring their own beliefs with them” when viewing the stones, Wiley said.

As soon as they were revealed, local pastors decried the stones as satanic. “We don’t think Mr. Christian is a Christian,” said James Traffensted of the Elberton Church of God after the 1980 ceremony. “Look what it says about the



VIDEO SCREENGRAB VIA WSB-TV

LANDMARK DEMOLISHED: *Damage to the Georgia Guidestones monument near Elberton, Georgia, on July 6. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation said the monument, which some Christians regard as satanic, was damaged by an explosion.*

unity of the world. That’s where the Antichrist will unite the governments of the world.”

In his 1986 self-published book, *Common Sense Renewed*, Christian called himself “a follower of Jesus,” expressing a broad view of spirituality and religion. “No religion has a monopoly on truth,” he wrote.

The satanic origin theory never fully retreated, and it recently gained steam when former gubernatorial candidate Republican Kandiss Taylor made demolishing the stones part of her 2022 campaign. On May 2, she tweeted: “Elect me Governor of Georgia, and I will bring the Satanic Regime to its knees—and DEMOLISH the Georgia Guidestones.”

After the stones were destroyed, she tweeted, “God is God all by Himself. He can do ANYTHING He wants to do. That includes striking down Satanic Guidestones.”

Taylor has since stated that she does not support vandalism and has disavowed a connection to any such destruction.

The bombing was not the first time the monument was targeted. In 2008, a masked man calling himself an “American patriot” defaced the monument as a warning to the “global elite.” He tied the Guidestones to a coming new world order, a conspiracy theory perpetuated by QAnon followers and expressed by personalities such as InfoWars founder Alex Jones.

Others of various political or religious affiliations criticized the stones as a call for mass depopulation or support for eugenics. Theories abound.

Feeding those beliefs is the rumor that Christian was a Rosicrucian and part of a secret historical order of esoteric philosophers and thinkers. The initials “R. C.” are, for some, a clear indicator, as well as the stones’ precepts and astronomical usage.

A local group of Wiccans performed periodic rituals at the site not long after the stones were erected. Lady Galadriel and Lord Athanor, founders of Grove of the Unicorn, would regularly visit the stones with others, believing the land had spiritual significance.

Other occultists and those who study the world’s spiritual centers agreed. According to Wiley, a Christian preacher once offered to donate money to beautify the place, claiming the site was sacred.

After seeing video of the bombing, Wiley, who calls himself a southerner and an “exvangelical,” said he was not surprised at the stones’ fate, citing the gross amount of superstition surrounding the stones for all these years. Wiley is fearful that this is a “harbinger of things to come.”

“The stones would probably have survived a nuclear war” as Christian intended, Wiley said, “but they could not survive Southern culture.” —Heather Greene, Religion News Service

Methodist woman donates 25 acres for bird sanctuary

Betty Hinshaw had always lived in cities when her husband decided, in 1956, that they should move to rural Northwest Arkansas. She made him promise there wouldn't be snakes.

They saw one the first day as they drove the dusty road to their old farmhouse. It had a newly installed bathroom but no air conditioning. The nearest school was two rooms—not counting outhouses.

So much was new, but Hinshaw quickly took to country life and especially the land she and her husband owned: Rocking Chair Ranch. They raised four children there, and she became deeply involved in the community, including the Methodist church.

At 97, Hinshaw still lives on the ranch, in a more comfortable home than the original. But she doesn't own as much of the pastureland she loves to look out on.

That's because she recently donated 25 of her roughly 100 acres to the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust for the new Betty Hinshaw Bird Sanctuary.

"Our feathered friends have been happy here for years," she said in prepared remarks for the June 2 dedication. "And now their special area will be safe in the hands of the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust."

The ceremony drew a crowd of Hinshaw's family members and friends. Among the speakers was Andrew

Thompson, pastor of First United Methodist Church of Springdale, Arkansas, where Hinshaw has been a member for more than six decades.

"Ms. Betty and her family have been dedicated to serving our community for decades," Thompson said in an email interview. "Dedicating her land for a perpetual bird sanctuary is an extension of that service. I think it's wonderful."

The bird-watching will get better as the pastureland is restored to native grasses and becomes prime habitat for grasslands birds, said Marson Nance, Northwest Arkansas Land Trust's director of land stewardship and research.

Along with appreciating rural Northwest Arkansas, Hinshaw became a protector of it. That extended to wildlife—even snakes.

Her daughter Dawn remembers that if one was close to the house, Betty wouldn't kill it or have it killed. Instead, she would grab a shovel or rake, scoop the snake up or let it curl around the handle, and walk it to the pasture for a safe release.

Betty tended injured animals, too, and kept the bird feeders full.

"I've always said about my mom that she was an environmentalist before environmentalism was cool," Dawn Hinshaw said.

The Hinshaw family has been around long enough to see Northwest Arkansas, part of the Ozarks, become the state's fastest-growing region. Betty had read in the newspaper about the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust, which works to preserve natural areas and historic structures. With the support of her family, she decided to give land for a bird sanctuary.

The Northwest Arkansas Land Trust has done research on the bird sanctuary and remaining Hinshaw property, which includes a creek and a lake where bald eagles and ospreys dive for fish.

The land was classified as oak barrens in an 1832 federal government survey. That means it was mostly savanna, with an understory of native grasses and wildflowers, and a scattering of white and blackjack oaks.

The trust plans dawn-to-dusk public access to the sanctuary, but the management priority is restoring native grasses, shrub thickets, and pollinator habitat.

A 2019 study, reported in *Science* magazine, estimated that the North American bird population has declined by 3 billion since 1970. Grassland bird species—such as Eastern meadowlark, bobolink and Henslow's sparrow—are particularly threatened, leading to a critical need for habitat preservation and restoration.

The Betty Hinshaw Bird Sanctuary is the first Northwest Arkansas Land Trust property dedicated to bird conservation, and it's one of the region's first to focus on grassland birds.

At the sanctuary dedication, Hinshaw quoted Genesis on God's command to Noah about filling the ark ("seven of every kind of bird, male and female"). She also shared her concern about global warming.

Hinshaw's 25-acre gift is an act of environmental protection but also a way of paying forward, in perpetuity, her good fortune in coming to rural Northwest Arkansas.

"I love this land," she said. "I loved it from the beginning, really." —Sam Hodges, United Methodist News Service



GIVING BACK: Betty Hinshaw (left) addresses the crowd at the June 2 dedication of the Betty Hinshaw Bird Sanctuary in Tontitown, Arkansas. The 97-year-old United Methodist gave 25 acres to the Northwest Arkansas Land Trust to create the sanctuary. Grassland bird species such as the Eastern meadowlark (right) are a conservation focus of the new sanctuary.

People

COURTESY OF FRIENDSHIP PRESS



■ **William Bergkamp** has been named the interim chief executive officer of Friendship Press, which supports the National Council of Churches and publishes the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Bergkamp comes to Friendship Press after nearly two decades at 1517 Media, the publishing arm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He most recently served as editor in chief of the organization's Fortress Press imprint.

In a statement, Bergkamp said he was excited to bring his experience to Friendship Press.

"I am looking forward to seeing what we accomplish together for the sake of the Gospel." —Dawn Araujo-Hawkins

■ Influential United Church of Christ leader **Teruo Kawata** died July 1. He was 94.

Kawata, a Japanese American whose family was interned in an Arizona relocation camp from 1942 to 1944, was instrumental in creating the UCC's Pacific Islander and Asian American ministries. He was also the first person of Asian descent to hold the office of conference minister in the Central Pacific Conference and in the Hawaii Conference.

Kawata was ordained in the Congregational Christian Church—one of the denominations that would later merge to become the United Church of Christ—in 1952. After serving local churches in California and Hawaii, Kawata joined the



COURTESY OF THE PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

national staff of the UCC in 1970, working primarily on efforts to support local churches and spiritual formation.

In an open letter to the Hawaii Conference of the UCC following Kawata's death, David Vázquez-Levy, president of the Pacific School of Religion, one of Kawata's alma maters, called Kawata a "remarkable individual" who "embodied the best of PSR's vision and commitments and contributed so richly to the development of the leaders for the church across many communities with a powerful impact on the leadership, theology, and formation of Asian Pacific Islander communities." —Dawn Araujo-Hawkins

■ Religious social ethicist **AnneMarie Mingo** will be the next head of the Metro-Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Mingo comes to the seminary from Penn State University, where she was most recently an assistant professor of African American studies and women's, gender, and sexuality studies.

In a statement, Asa Lee, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary's president, praised Mingo: "She is not only an expert in . . . Christian social ethics, but she is also a prolific writer and researcher with a proven track record of engaging students in the classroom."

Mingo's research interests include the US civil rights movement, the South African anti-apartheid movement, and the Movement for Black Lives. An ordained itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Mingo also writes about peace, reconciliation, and the influence of Black music and media on social activism. She is currently working on her first book, *Have You Got Good Religion? Black Women's Faith, Courage, and Moral Imagination in the Civil Rights Movement*.

In 2019, Mingo founded the Cultivating Courageous Resisters Project, which helps equip intergenerational religious activists' work toward social justice.

The Metro-Urban Institute at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary was founded



FACEBOOK

in 1991. It is the academic, advocacy, and programmatic arm of the seminary that is particularly concerned with the factors that shape Christian ministry in urban contexts. —Dawn Araujo-Hawkins

■ Historian **Elizabeth Miller** has been selected to head the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism at Goshen College. Additionally, she will teach in the college's history department and direct the Mennonite Historical Library.

Miller and her husband were most recently the program directors for Mennonite Central Committee in Ecuador and Colombia—a position they held for five years. Mil-

ler's book about the history of Colombian Anabaptist-Mennonite churches, *Desde el Principio Anabautistas: La Historia de las Iglesias Menonitas y Hermanos Menonitas en Colombia, 1946–1975*, was published earlier this year.

"I am extremely pleased that Elizabeth has agreed to carry forward the work of the ISGA," said the institute's outgoing director, John D. Roth, in a newsletter. "She brings a depth of international experience, demonstrated administrative gifts, academic gifts, and a love for the church to the task."

In a statement, Miller expressed her excitement for her new position.

"Anabaptist faith and practice has looked different across time and place. To be able to bring those distinct expressions in conversation with each other through the work of the ISGA at Goshen College is both a joy and a privilege."

The ISGA was founded in 2011. Its primary initiatives are research, publication, and education about global Anabaptist history and theology. In the last decade, the institute has been responsible for the creation of Global Anabaptist Wiki, a digital archival platform, as well as GAMEO, the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. In 2017, the institute published Global Anabaptist Profile, a survey of Anabaptist life and practices in 18 countries. —Dawn Araujo-Hawkins



FACEBOOK

LIVING BY The Word

August 21, 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Jeremiah 1:4–10

JEREMIAH'S MISSION, like that of some other prophets, begins with God calling him to speak an uncomfortable message. Yet he soon learns that God's call is not about his ability but God's. Scripture often reiterates that God is near the broken and far from the proud. God rarely calls us to do what we can do on our own—we do not need a call for that. God calls us to what is impossible on our own, so we learn to depend on him.

Even God's plan to use Jeremiah originated beyond Jeremiah: God planned this mission before Jeremiah was born. God also "consecrated" Jeremiah for this work. Scripture uses the same Hebrew term for consecrating the tabernacle and consecrating the priests. The term means "to set apart" for special use by God; once set apart for this special use, the person or object becomes sacred and cannot be used for profane (ordinary) purposes. Jeremiah's mission will hereafter consume his heart and life. Calling his generation back to God in the face of imminent disaster demands such focus that Jeremiah cannot even afford to be distracted by ordinary human ties (15:17, 16:1–9).

God identifies a mission the scale of which is surely beyond Jeremiah's imagination. Jeremiah will prophesy to "the nations," pronouncing judgment on those who do not submit to God's plan. The book of Jeremiah thus includes oracles against many nations. Most nations had their own prophets or diviners, sometimes in the pay of local sanctuaries or royal courts. Part of their job was to promise that their gods would supply the king with victory and blessings. This sometimes entailed pronouncing judgment on rival nations, although we do not know how often they actually sent messengers to those nations' ambassadors, as Jeremiah does (27:3).

More disconcertingly, God calls Jeremiah to prophesy to his own people—God's people (1:14–19). The task appears daunting. "I do not know how to speak," Jeremiah protests, "for I am only a boy." Elders had experience speaking wisdom at the gates of local towns; Jeremiah lacks any such experience. His protest about his speaking ability echoes Moses, who also tried to evade God's call (Exod. 4:10).

Moses, like Abraham and Sarah, may have considered himself too old for God's mission. Jeremiah considers himself too young. During this portion of Josiah's reign (Jer. 1:2), the most prominent genuine prophetic figure is the prophetess Huldah (2 Kings 22:14). But God is preparing young Jeremiah for a time when the consensus of the royal prophets will be a false

prophecy, telling people what they want to hear—that God is not upset about injustice and sin in the land (Jer. 6:14, 8:11). God is starting Jeremiah off young, because Jeremiah's mission to Israel will take his entire lifetime (1:2–3).

But Jeremiah does have reason for apprehension, as God acknowledges. The message that God is angry about injustice, that God will punish those who mistreat each other, is not popular. People want their prophets to tell them how everything will go well with them. God encourages Jeremiah not to be afraid, because God is with him to deliver him. The rulers of Jeremiah's own people will oppose him and his message, but God will deliver him (1:18–19). And indeed, God preserves Jeremiah's life and message, despite a series of dangers. Jeremiah is beaten, thrown in the stocks, called a traitor, threatened with death, and denounced by prophets with a more marketable message. His own relatives are against him. If Jeremiah eventually sounds a bit paranoid, it is because he is one of those rare people whom almost everybody really is against.

Yet God is with him and does deliver him—just as God promised (1:8, 1:19, 15:20). This promise is consistent with how God calls and empowers others. When the angel of the Lord calls Gideon a mighty warrior, Gideon protests that he is the least respected person in Israel, with no following. The encouragement he receives in response is that the Lord is the one sending him and

If Jeremiah sounds a bit paranoid, it's for good reason.

will be with him (Judg. 6:14–16). Likewise, when God calls Moses, Moses begins his series of objections with the question, "Who am I?" God's ultimate answer is about who God is (Exod. 3:11–14).

In 2 Corinthians 2:16, speaking of his own ministry and hardship, Paul asks, "Who is sufficient for these things?" His answer resounds several verses later: "Not that we are sufficient on our own . . . our sufficiency is from God." Like Jeremiah, we can do what God calls us to do not because of who we are but because of the one who is with us.

Jeremiah was ultimately vindicated, though some of that vindication came after his lifetime. His generation did not usually listen to him, but three later books of the Bible emphasize that God's message through Jeremiah was fulfilled (2 Chron. 36:21–22; Ezra 1:1; Dan. 9:2). Sometimes we must honor our Lord and preach the biblical message to those reluctant to listen. Sometimes we are up against consensus, and the message seems to fall on deaf ears. In the long run, however, God proves faithful to his message and to his servants who are faithful to it.

Reflections on the lectionary

*August 28, 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 14:1, 7–14*

JESUS' MEALS OFTEN prove controversial. Some high-status religious people complain when Jesus eats with sinners. Yet such prominent figures also sometimes invite Jesus to their own dinners, and Jesus comes. Even these dinners can become occasions for theological debate with Pharisees—known for their meticulous knowledge of the law, their traditions, and their theological debates. There are many dinners in this section of Luke, and formal dinners were a common setting for both discussion and lectures.

Since Jesus often teaches in synagogues on the sabbath, his meal at a Pharisaic leader's home on the sabbath might be meant to honor him after he taught nearby. Still, Luke says that others there are observing him closely, ready to challenge him as needed. Given Jesus' growing popularity, they want to make sure that he is leading people in the right way—their way.

Jesus has just healed someone in front of them that same day (14:2–6). The man was suffering from edema, or dropsy. Many ancient physicians believed that the body could be either too dry, as in the case of a withered appendage (6:6), or too wet. They often commented on the latter affliction—edema—in which part of the body swells due to excess fluid. Some believed that particular herbs or other treatments could help, but others complained that when it appeared comorbid with another disease, it was beyond cure.

Pharisees debated among themselves which activities, when performed on the sabbath, constituted work. Shammaites were the dominant school of Pharisees in Jesus' day, and they took a stricter view on this subject: this majority school prohibited medicine and prayer for the sick on the sabbath except when life was at stake. The minority school, the Hillelites, allowed such prayer. After AD 70 they became the majority school, so subsequent Jewish tradition developed especially the views of the more lenient Hillelites.

Jesus, like the Hillelites, welcomes prayer for the sick on the sabbath. He points out that his hearers would rescue their animal from trouble on the sabbath (though some stricter Jews called Essenes would not). People matter even more than animals. So just as Jesus heals a man with a withered hand (6:10), here he heals a man with edema. Health care is an honorable calling, as Jesus shows.

While he has everyone's attention, Jesus also challenges the conventional seating practice for ancient dinners. Ancient Mediterranean, male, urban culture featured heavy competition for status, a competition often reflected in seating arrangements, including in synagogues and at banquets. Normally a

host would invite peers or people of somewhat lower social status. To refuse such an invitation without a good excuse would insult the host's dignity (see 14:18–21).

But guests were also protective of their dignity. The most prestigious positions were nearest the host. Such banquets often had three or four couches arranged around the center of the room. These couches did not have backs, so three or four people could recline on each one. Each diner would recline on the left elbow, with their right hand free to take the food in front of them. They would be facing the center of the room, with their feet pointed away from the table. That is why Jesus, probably on the couch adjoining the host's, can speak directly to his host (7:40) but must turn to praise the woman anointing his feet (7:44).

Sources from this period are full of complaints from guests who felt dishonored because they were given less prestigious places in banquets than they felt they deserved. Although the complaints are most obvious in Roman sources, the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish sources illustrate that seating people according to rank was a Jewish custom as well. In fact, the practice of seeking honor had been around for a long time. "Do not . . . stand in the place of the great," Proverbs warns, "for it is better to be told, 'Come up here,' than to be put lower in the presence of a noble" (25:6–7). Jewish sages had long urged humility, but people of status were often more moved by social mores and the congratulations offered by others.

In keeping with the biblical proverb, Jesus invites his hearers to take the place of lowest status. It brings less dishonor to humble oneself and then be exalted by another than the other way around. Jesus then appeals to a wider biblical principle: God exalts the lowly but is far from the proud. As Jesus goes on to show, this practice has eternal implications.

Part of maintaining honor was inviting peers to banquets and being honored by reciprocal invitations. But Jesus warns his host that the only reward for this practice is maintaining human honor. Instead, one should invite the poor and those with disabilities who cannot repay, meeting their genuine needs and trusting in God's repayment at the resurrection of the righteous. That is, there is coming a day when God will sort everything out, and it is eternal honor from God on that day that really counts.

While modern Western society is not based on honor and shame to the extent that ancient Mediterranean society was, most of us still care about our reputation. Jesus urges us to have a more eternal perspective. What really matters is not what others think of us now, but what God will bring to light in the future, based on how we can help people that God cares about now.

The author is Craig S. Keener, professor of biblical studies at Asbury Theological Seminary.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A GREEN CHURCH?

Thinking big (and small)

by Anna Woofenden

AT PRESBYTERIAN-NEW ENGLAND

Congregational Church in Saratoga Springs, New York, environmental sustainability is woven into every aspect of church life, from how the church is heated to what happens at coffee hour to the content of sermons to what products are purchased for events. Being a green church has become a way of life, not an issue to be debated.

The pastor, Kate Forer, said that church members began this work several years ago by exploring together a series of questions that helped them to connect the dots between their actions and the entire network of creation. Where does our electricity come from? Are there opportunities for us to buy renewable energy, as a congregation and as individuals? If not, how can we as a church work to make those available? What are we doing with our trash? Are there ways to reduce our trash and increase our recycling and composting? What about transportation to church?

Anna Woofenden is author of This Is God's Table: Finding Church beyond the Walls and rector at St. John's Episcopal Church in Northampton, Massachusetts.



They asked these local questions and then connected them to the global ones. How are we advocating for environmental stewardship in our community, state, nation, and world? What justice issues do we need to tap into? Climate change is already affecting people, leading some to seek refugee status and asylum in other countries—what are we doing to support them? How do we help people in other communities have access to clean water?

Such questions became powerful guides as the congregation navigated the choices and actions they were taking as a community. While people were generally supportive of the idea of being more environmentally active and sustainable, the work limped along for several years as they did a little here and a little there. Even when the church installed solar panels on the roof, there wasn't a cohesive effort.

"I was 100 percent on board with the work from the start," Forer said, "but it wasn't until one of our congregation members took on the leadership of our environmental action team that things really got going." Under Laura Falk's leadership, the EAT has taken off and is making continual and substantive change. "The team is jumping into as many things as they possibly can," Forer reported. Every month they have shared a different focus for the congregation to explore, and they have made lasting changes accordingly. For example, one month they focused on plant-based eating. "Then we presented to the congregation on the environmental impacts of our food choices, shared recipes with the congregation each week, and even had food sampling during coffee hour where various plant-based dishes were shared," said Forer.

Forer now sees the values of environmental justice seeping into other areas of the church's life and work. The community members in charge of coffee hour began to ask how they could be environmentally friendly in their hospitality. They decided that they could no longer use disposable cups, plates, or napkins—despite the ongoing time commitment of washing dishes. Office manager Julie Campbell, who does all the purchasing for the church, is part of the changes as well. "I cannot in good conscience buy individual bottled water for events anymore," she declared, and then she worked with the rest of the staff to get a watercooler installed.

"Care for the earth is not something that's separate from our life as Christians," Forer said. "I preach about immigration in the same breath as the climate crisis. It's recognized widely as one of the prominent issues we're dealing with as Christians. It's not even a question, rather part of the litany of things that we are praying for, working for, and advocating for in our worship, my preaching, our work and ethics as a church."

I asked Forer if they've met resistance from members of the congregation. "Honestly, not really," she replied. "We continue to strive to talk about the work of environmental justice in a way that raises awareness without guilt-tripping people or making them feel personally shamed." One of her parishioners is a conventional dairy farmer, and he wrestles with the many facets of how his farm and work intersect with environmental challenges. "I don't think he feels like he's ever treated 'less than' in our congregation," said Forer. "The thing is, we recognize and name that the climate crisis is so big that none of us

can do everything, and all of us have to stretch ourselves and do more than we think we can. And so we have to work together and be kind to each other while challenging and calling our community forward in the work."

Many churches are grappling with their responses to the realities of climate change. They are installing solar panels, putting in garden beds in place of grass, and divesting from fossil fuels. These activities and others are markers of what it means to be a green church.

Since no corner or aspect of society is untouched by the climate crisis, faith-based climate advocates across the country are making a case that our faith communities are a key part of activating and cultivating the work that is needed in response. But that quickly raises the next flurry of questions: What does it mean to respond to the climate crisis as the church? What is our environmental impact, individually and as a group? How are faith communities particularly called and poised for this work? And where do we start?

A green congregation weaves care of creation into every aspect of its life together.

The root of the church's obligation is both spiritual and social. The foundational goodness of all creation connects humanity with earth, water, and air. "God brings two forms of life into being together—soil and servant—to live in dependent caring relationship," says theologian Wilson Dickinson. "God breathes life into this humanity and then plants a garden, placing the earthlings in it. The earthlings are put in the garden of Eden 'to till it and keep it.' The verbs that mark this central task—the human vocation in creation—could also be rendered 'to serve and preserve.'" Humanity is tasked with serving and preserving creation; we are formed in dependence on creation and on each other.

But while our mandate to participate in protecting creation is clear, it is also overwhelming. Peter Sawtell invites churches to reframe the question. Instead of asking, "What can churches do about the climate crisis?" the Eco-Justice Ministries executive director suggests we ask, "What does it mean to be the church in this time of great ecological and social justice crisis?"

In light of this reframing, Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, the missioner for creation care in the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, defines a green church as one that understands that we are in the midst of a climate and ecological crisis—and responds as a responsible caregiver to planet Earth. Bullitt-Jonas echoes Forer: "A green church weaves care of creation into every aspect of its life together, from preaching and praying, to adult education, to public witness and advocacy." This definition calls us to treat care for God's creation not as one more program or to-do item but as essential to the work of loving the neighbor and being followers of Christ in the world.

Many denominations are taking on climate pledges and

projects and putting together lists of steps for congregations to take. Churches can look to denominational resources or those from ecumenical partners, and they can join in with existing programs—there is no need to reinvent them. Brooks Berndt, the minister for environmental justice for the United Church of Christ recommends this approach: “Pick one of these systems, maybe from your own denomination’s resources or maybe from one of the collective, and start working the system. Whether you’re a layperson or a clergyperson, you can begin, and commit to working through the process—step by step by step. It’s less about making all the changes all at once and more about a sustained commitment over time.”

Small steps, like banning Styrofoam or planting a garden, can lead to larger programs.


Peter Rood, who was the rector at Holy Nativity Episcopal Church in Los Angeles for many years, started 12 years ago with what he termed “low-hanging fruit.” This included banning Styrofoam and many paper products and switching to energy-efficient light bulbs. That led to planting flower gardens used for worship spaces and then edible landscaping. Now the church has an active community garden, more than 30 fruit trees, and a plethora of programs and initiatives that promote care for God’s earth and God’s people.

Some newer congregations have made the idea of being a green church fundamental to their identity. The Garden Church in Los Angeles took an empty lot and turned it into an urban farm and outdoor sanctuary. The Keep and Till in rural Maryland meets on a family farm to cultivate both food and church community. The Wild Church Network and Holy Hikes are growing as more and more church groups take their liturgies outside.

Jonathan Lacock-Nisly reminds us that “being green isn’t one-size-fits-all.” The Interfaith Power and Light director of faithful advocacy hears from congregations that feel like they don’t have the time or resources to be a green church—especially congregations that are already working to address issues like systemic racism or poverty. “Often those congregations are already doing amazing greening work that just needs to be recognized,” he points out. “Is your church working for access to local, healthy food? Are you trying to help members without cars get to church on Sunday or to doctors’ appointments throughout the week? That’s really at the heart of what it means to be a green church—seeing where community needs meet caring for creation.”

The climate crisis is here, calling us to include our planet’s needs in our churches. This is not a luxury or an affinity group. This work is a growing imperative for the body of Christ called to love God and neighbor. I believe the church is being called to imagine being a place where a green team or a climate justice committee is a standard part of congregational life, right

alongside the finance committee and the children’s program team. I dare to imagine our sermons and our prayers, our choices and our actions, our welcoming of climate refugees, and our systems to feed people centering around how we can best steward and care for this sacred planet we all live on. We all live on this planet together; the church is called to play its part.

Bullitt-Jonas calls us to quickly take “the biggest, bravest step that any given church can possibly take.” 

40 IDEAS FOR CONGREGATIONS

1. Use rechargeable batteries in your wireless mics.
2. Compost your food scraps and coffee grounds.
3. Switch to energy-efficient light bulbs in your church building. Bonus: put them on timers or motion sensors.
4. Put flowers in vases of water without using floral foam.
5. Switch to 100 percent beeswax candles.
6. Swap out conventional cleaning supplies for environmentally friendly ones, and use environmentally friendly ice melt.
7. Use the same bulletin for an entire season, with small inserts for Sunday-specific information.
8. Install electric hand dryers in bathrooms. Or use sustainably produced paper towels and then compost them.
9. Source food locally for meals cooked at the church.
10. Install solar panels on your church building.
11. Put in a bike rack and create an easy and secure place for parents to store strollers when they walk to church.
12. Install rainwater collection tanks. This reduces both your building’s impact on wastewater treatment and your use of city water for irrigation.

13. Download Interfaith Power and Light's free start-up kit (www.cool-congregations.org/start-up-kit/) and pick an item to work on.
14. Get your local electric company—or someone in your congregation who has the skills—to do an energy audit, and commit to working through the list of recommendations. Things to look at include the building's insulation and air sealing, the efficiency and cleanliness of the heating systems, and the possibility of installing more-efficient heat sources.
15. Implement a building-wide ban on bottled water and Styrofoam. Include this as part of a green policy for rental agreements.
16. If you aren't recycling, start. If you are, find out where your recyclables are going—and explore ways you can reduce or reuse the waste in the first place.
17. Walk or ride your bike to church. Develop a program to encourage churchgoers to share rides, pick up those less able to get to church, and extend the church community beyond the walls and onto the roads.
18. Gather a small group of people to research and map your local food system. Discover where food is being grown, how it is being distributed, who has access to what types of food in what neighborhoods, and how food waste is handled. Look for ways the church can be a resource for supporting food sovereignty in your neighborhood.
19. Host an annual clothing swap.
20. Have your governing body resolve to eliminate purchasing of all disposable cups, plates, bowls, and silverware. Move to reusable items for coffee hour and church meals—napkins and tablecloths, too—and create a culture of dishwashing as a spiritual practice or fellowship opportunity.
21. Try moving toward a plant-based diet in your shared meals as a community. Experiment with various recipes and dishes together.
22. Host a potluck at which people bring dishes made entirely from food grown within 100 miles.
23. Partner with a local farm to make your church a drop-off point for a community-supported agriculture program, and recruit households from the congregation to commit to participating in the CSA.
24. Replace your church lawn with vegetable garden beds and feed your local community.
25. Create a “pay what you can” farmstand to share produce with the community.
26. Share your space. A building that sits empty for most of the week is a waste of energy. Fill it with community groups, classes, nonprofits, etc.
27. Map your local watershed and see how your church is impacting the water in your community. Get involved with projects to add rain gardens, reduce lawn chemicals in runoff, and take other actions specific to your place in your watershed.
28. Check out Project Drawdown (www.drawdown.org). Dozens of scientists worked together for years to calculate the changes that would have the biggest impact on climate change. Their top ten include several things congregations can do: reduce food waste, avoid beef, add rooftop solar, and keep refrigerators and air conditioners in good repair.
29. Learn about the Black Church Food Security Network, and bring founder Heber Brown's examples and questions to your community (see “Black churches tackle food insecurity,” Nov. 18, 2020).
30. Find out what organizations and groups are welcoming climate refugees in your area and how you can offer support.
31. Build relationships with your neighbors who are living outdoors and learn how climate change and poverty are affecting them.
32. Look at your church's investments and take steps toward divesting from the fossil fuel industry.
33. Participate in marches, sit-ins, actions, and civil disobedience on behalf of the planet.
34. Start a study group on eco-theology and share the learning with the community.
35. Create liturgies of lament and prayerfully consider the effects of the climate crisis together in community.
36. Preach on gospel messages of creation care. Wondering where to start? Try *Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit*, by Leah D. Schade, and *The Green Good News: Christ's Path to Sustainable and Joyful Life*, by T. Wilson Dickinson.
37. Check out the Wild Church Network and Holy Hikes, and consider joining an existing group or taking a group from your congregation to do liturgy outdoors.
38. Involve the church's children and teens in deciding what to do and in leading the charge.
39. Practice sabbath, individually and collectively, and notice how we are tied up in consumerism and greed.
40. Pray daily, with words and actions, for the care of our precious earthly home.

—AW, with gratitude for the
collective wisdom of friends
and colleagues who helped
brainstorm this list

In the Hebrew Bible, God's love is maternal

The mother of Israel

by Malka Simkovich

JEWISH IDENTITY IS often understood through the lens of rituals that were developed and practiced primarily by men. This understanding risks placing women on the margins of Jewish life. Narratives in the Hebrew Bible, however, align the central experiences of the people of Israel with female experiences. These experiences are often the primary lens through which God, nationhood, and teaching all are understood. A closer look at these narratives can radically shift our understanding of what it means to be an observant Jew.

Take for example a story in which God and Moses are in the midst of a blowout fight. Some rabble-rousing Israelites who have complained about the lack of food in the desert have ignited God's anger, and they have been consumed by fire. Panicked by this event and by their vulnerability in the wilderness, the people confront Moses and demand that he provide them with sustenance:

The Israelites wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing but all this manna to look at." (Num. 11:4–6)

Overwhelmed by the people's demands, Moses turns to God and challenges him:

"Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child,' to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me." (Num. 11:12–14)

Moses reminds God that he is not the people's mother. Instead, he implies, only God is the mother figure of Israel. Moses' choice of maternal imagery is far from arbitrary. It is an astute response to the Israelites' own infantile complaints. The Hebrew *mi ya'achilenu basar*, rendered above as "If only we had meat to eat," literally translates as "Who will feed us meat?" The image evokes spoon-fed toddlers. The Israelites are in their spiritual infancy, and God and Moses disagree over who is obligated to be their caretaker. According to Moses, only God can fulfill the role of mother to these demanding children.

This image of God as mother extends through biblical tradition as a way to highlight the mystery of God's attachment to Israel. Later, images of motherhood are applied to Zion and to Jerusalem, though in a very different way. And later still, the rabbis ascribed to themselves the status of motherhood by way of their work as Torah teachers. They believed that such teaching was a life-giving act which guaranteed the survival of the Jewish people. In other words, from ancient times to the early Common Era, the experience of motherhood was central to the understanding of what it meant to be a Jew.

The Hebrew Bible preserves many images of God acting in a motherly way. God is a seamstress for the first man and woman, the provider of food to the Israelites in the wilderness, and the continual sustainer of life. Recognizing the powerful emotions that are a part of motherhood, biblical writers drew upon this experience to explore God's mysterious cultivation of an enduring relationship with Israel, even as Israel provided God with no obvious benefit.

As a mother, God is protective, powerful, and bound to her children through love.

Some biblical authors home in on the image of God specifically as a nursing mother. The author of Isaiah 49, for example, has God say to the Judeans, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isa. 49:15). The writer of this verse understood that a nursing mother and her child are bonded by the mother's unconditional love and by the child's utter dependence. God's unconditional love, the prophet asserts, goes even beyond that of a nursing mother. Because God has promised to maintain this bond and protect the people, Israel can call upon God to help in times of crisis. As mother, God is accountable, compassionate, protective, powerful, and bound to her children through love.

Malka Simkovich is chair of Jewish studies and director of Catholic-Jewish studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and a Kogod Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute.



Illustration © Archv / iStock / Getty

In the exilic and postexilic periods, the exploration of the metaphor of motherhood was expanded from God to Zion. Zion, however, is a bereft mother, weak and helplessly dependent on God to restore her children.

Texts that explore Zion as a mother figure are dominated by a profound sense of loss. They imagine Zion as the wife of God, who is vulnerable to the seductions and abuses of foreign nations. God's comforting words to Zion are meant to assure Judean readers that God is still attached to the people of Israel, despite the unspeakable pain of exile. The failure of Zion to protect her children lies at the heart of her shame. In this image from Jeremiah, for instance, Zion is presented as a mother, daughter, and wife:

For I heard a cry as of a woman in labor, anguish as of one bringing forth her first child, the cry of daughter Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands, "Woe is me! I am fainting before killers!" (Jer. 4:31)

As biblical writers developed the image of Zion as mother and God as father, the image of God as mother receded. The poems that close the second-century BCE book of Baruch depict Jerusalem as a bereaved woman who accepts that God has separated her from her children in a just response to their sins:

"Listen, you neighbors of Zion;
God has brought great sorrow upon me,
for I have seen the exile of my sons and daughters,
which the Everlasting brought upon them.

.....

Let no one rejoice over me, a widow
and bereaved of many;

I was left desolate because of the sins of my children,
because they turned away from the law of God."
(Bar. 4:9–12)

As Zion takes on the role of a grieving mother, God is cast in the role of father.

At the same time, Jewish writers also circulated tales that contain echoes of God's maternal love. Rather than imagining God as a mother figure, these texts focus on how one's love for God is akin to one's love for one's mother. Human love for a mother then becomes an analogy for devotion to God.

One example is the novella known as 2 Maccabees, which retells the events surrounding the Hasmonean rebellion in 167–160 BCE. At the center of this book is a legend about a Jewish mother who encourages her sons to be martyred rather than violate Jewish dietary laws. Instead of interpreting motherly love as an instinct to protect one's children from physical harm, the author of this text has the mother insist that her children be martyred as an expression of love for God, their true creator:

Filled with a noble spirit, [the mother] reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage and said to them, "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, in his mercy gives life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws." (2 Macc. 7:21–23)

The mother insists that her sons must be faithful to their true Mother, who is both the creator and reviver of life through the

resurrection of the dead. Her words likely refer to a passage in Ecclesiastes which links the mystery of motherhood to the ways of God: “Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother’s womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything” (Eccles. 11:5).

In Ecclesiastes, motherhood is an unknowable, abstract experience and a mystery that derives from God’s incomprehensible powers of creation. Second Maccabees transforms this notion into a declaration uttered by a woman whose biological motherhood authorizes her support of martyrdom.

The depiction of motherhood as a central Jewish experience is also prevalent in stories about Israelite and Jewish women who serve as protective heroes to the people. These women are so protective of Israel that they are credited with motherhood and, by extension, with godlike powers.

At twilight

The sun had lost its glare and some of its heat.
People arrived, stood talking, looked for seats.
Children resisted parents’ pleas to sit
And heard their names pronounced repeatedly.
Vacationers became an audience.
(I sat restless, too old for family road trips,
Relieved the Ozarks were our final stop.)
The drama, not yet underway, already—
Like smoke from burning leaves in autumn—spilled
Into the early-August, evening air,
Lending to it a pre-performance stir,
The scent of a beginning and an ending.
Silently there, behind the outdoor stage—
All flat expanse of packed fine dirt, on which
Two rough wood structures stood—tall trees reached up
And out, full branches arching, sheltering
The little world below as darkness fell.

Today, as oceans rise and chaos quickens,
Harold Bell Wright’s *The Shepherd of the Hills*
(The play I saw at age fourteen) comes back;
Or, not the play itself—the atmosphere
I breathed before the play had sprung to life.
Things do come back as gifts, forgotten things—
A tune, a name, a prayer first learned in childhood—
Unreasonably, against the evidence.
I see the faces of my grandchildren,
The bend-but-don’t-break lives of their moms and dads.
I hold out hope even now, in these sad times,
A twilight hope, no more than an intuition
Of pending revels, of encompassing love.

Charles Hughes

Charles Hughes’s poetry collections are The Evening Sky (2020) and Cave Art (2014), both published by Wiseblood Books.

When the prophetess Deborah leads Israel to victory over Canaanite enemies in Judges 4–5, for example, she identifies herself as “a mother in Israel” (5:7). We know nothing of Deborah’s marital status or whether she bore children. But Deborah’s experiences of biological motherhood are immaterial. What matters is that Deborah perceives herself as having taken on a maternal role in Israel’s destiny. This perception empowers Deborah to tap into her role as protector of the people. Just as a mother incubates the child in her womb from outside dangers, Deborah is the sole guardian of the Israelites who shields them from foreign enemies.

Centuries after Deborah’s story was written, a Judean Jew wrote a novella about a woman named Judith who assassinates a foreign general who besieged her city. The character of Judith was modeled after the biblical figure of Deborah and her counterpart Jael, who also helped lead the Israelites to victory by assassinating the enemy general Sisera. Judith’s story closes with a celebratory song that mimics Deborah’s song in Judges 5. Like Deborah, Judith identifies herself as a mother of Israel by depicting the enemy as wanting to “kill my young men with the sword, and dash my infants to the ground” (Jth. 16:4). Such references treat Israelite heroines as mothers, irrespective of their biological motherhood.

Deborah, Jael, and Judith are mother figures, elevated in their association with God.

The presentation of these heroines as mother figures connects these women not to their biological potential but to their actualization of divine motherhood. Motherhood does not demote these women to a lower social caste but elevates them in their association with God.

In the early Common Era, the rabbis began to identify themselves as mother figures to the Jewish people. Building on the idea, embedded deep within the Hebrew Bible, that true motherhood is experienced by those who give spiritual life to others, rabbinic writers suggested that as progenitors of the Torah they were comparable to life-giving mothers. The early rabbinic legal collection known as the Tosefta, for instance, suggests that those who teach Torah have a hand in human conception:

Whence do we learn that whoever teaches one chapter [of Mishnah] to his friend, the scriptures praise him as if he conceived him, formed him, and brought him into the world [*olam*]? . . . Just as that same mouth that infused the soul into the first man, so all those who bring even one creature under the wings of the Divine Presence, we praise him as if he conceived him, formed him, and brought him into the world. (Tosefta Horayot 2:7)

The first lines of this passage depict the sages as mothers who bring life into the world. The passage extends the metaphor

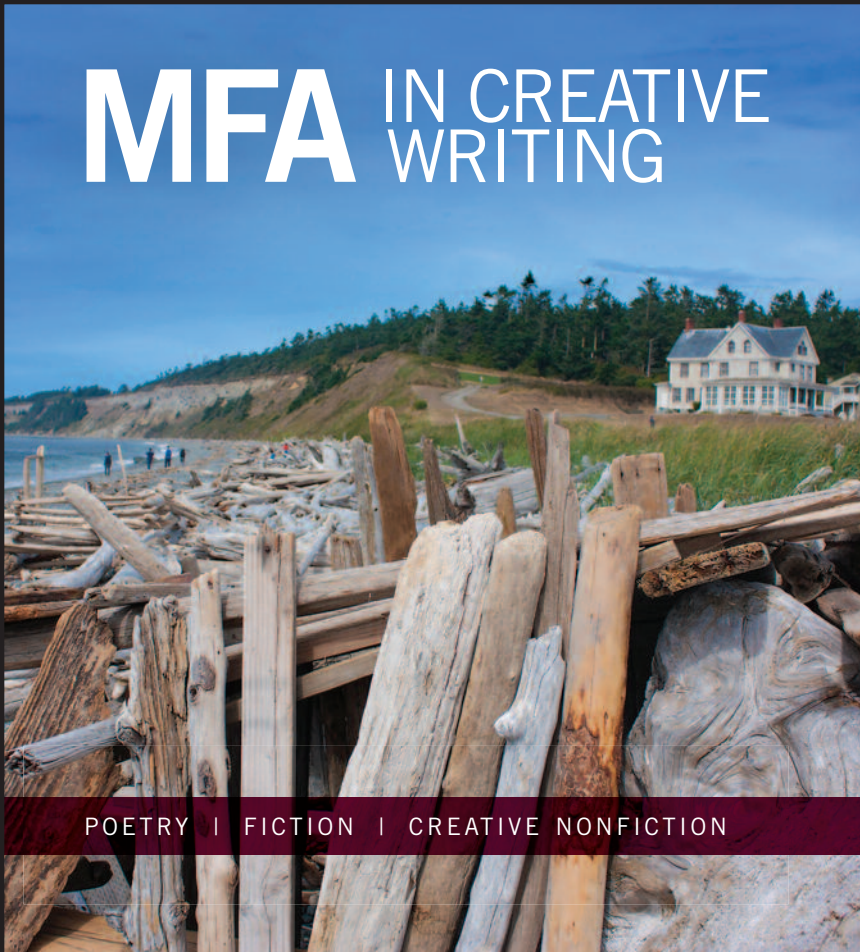
even further: these teachers are God-like in their life-giving capacities. This has implications for both *olam hazeh*, the present world, and *olam haba*, the world to come. In both cases, the teaching of Torah imbues the rabbis with a radical creative agency which invites them to encounter their divine essence through the experience of creation.

The midrashic commentary on the Song of Songs also associates motherhood with the transmission of Torah, though it focuses on the rabbis' biblical progenitors, Moses and Aaron. This commentary treats the Song of Songs as an allegorical text that imagines Israel as a woman whose most alluring features represent the greatest leaders of the Israelite people:

Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, browsing among the lilies" (Song of Songs 4:5): Just as these breasts are the splendor and glory of a woman, so too Moses and Aaron are the splendor and glory of Israel. . . . Just as these breasts are full of milk, Moses and Aaron fill Israel with Torah. And just as with these breasts, all that a woman eats, the baby eats and nurses from them, so too all of the Torah that Moses learned he taught to Aaron. That is what is meant by "Moses told Aaron all of the words of God" (Exod. 4:28). (Song of Songs Rabbah 4:5)

According to this commentary, Torah flows from Moses and Aaron and sustains Israel in the same way that milk flows from a woman's breast into her child's mouth. Here Israel is both mother and child: Israel's past leaders are mothers to Israelites and then Jews, who are their children. At the same time, teachers of Torah in all generations embody the mother. It seems that the sages rejected Moses' argument in Numbers 11 that he is not the mother of the people. Anyone who protects the people of Israel through the transmission of the life-giving Torah can be imagined as an extension of the divine mother.

Reading ancient texts that allegorize motherhood risks erasing the real experiences of Jewish women and Jewish motherhood. But by noting the centrality of motherhood in scriptural tradition—and its connection with divine love—we can re-center the experiences of womanhood and motherhood in our own religious self-understanding. These texts invite us to consider what might change if we put images about women and mothers in sacred narratives into conversation with sacred texts that consider the role of women and ritual. Those of us seeking to rectify the marginalization of women in the communal realm may find that the solution is embedded in our oldest and most sacred texts. If we listen closely, we might hear them asking us to think about how motherhood informs our relationship with God and our understanding of ourselves. CC



MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING

POETRY | FICTION | CREATIVE NONFICTION


Seattle Pacific University's low-residency MFA program is for apprentice writers who want to pursue accomplishment in the craft of writing, and a greater understanding of the relationship between faith and literature.

Merit scholarships available!

CORE FACULTY	
Bryan Bliss	David McGlynn
Scott Cairns	Gina Ochsner
Robert Clark	Mischa Willett
Jennifer Maier	Lauren Winner

RECENT VISITORS	
Uwem Akpan	Josip Novakovich
Jericho Brown	Melissa Range
Robert Cording	Richard Rodriguez
David James Duncan	Mary Szybist
Carolyn Forché	Christian Wiman
Dana Gioia	
Patricia Hampel	
Pam Houston	
Karen An-hwei Lee	
Bret Lott	
Thomas Lynch	
Marilyn Nelson	

LEARN MORE
spu.edu/mfa
 800-601-0603



A call to sacrifice, advocacy, and repair

Abolitionist spirituality

by Willie Dwayne Francois III

A FEW WINTERS AGO, a local high school booster club invited me to offer the keynote address at a celebration for their football team. The young men had managed to make history as a ball club, but only a couple months prior, the football stadium had morphed into a firing range, inflicting wounds that will not soon heal. In a mass shooting, a ten-year-old boy lost his life. His murder froze the hopes and comforts of the county and halted a stellar football season.

I arrived at the country club for the annual celebration of players and parents keenly aware of the tension. Undoubtedly, this was a moment of pride and possibility. But so many of these Black and Brown boys lived under the unchecked threat of gun violence—in addition to the daily trials of food scarcity and opportunity apartheid. I gave a 20-minute speech, using less than a minute of it to say, “You are the embodied hope our communities need. This hope outlives last night’s growl of a stomach due to a missed meal or tomorrow’s endurance of a teacher’s inability to understand the unrelenting pressures of living Black or Latinx in America.”

Racial pessimism is a spiritual crisis. How can we drown out the White noise of nihilism?

After I returned to the head table, a few people affirmed the speech as appropriate for the occasion and audience. However, as I reached for the salad dressing, a White chemistry teacher glared at me.

“Are you sure you’re a pastor?” he inquired. “I’m offended you told these boys White teachers don’t understand them. Talking about race only makes race an issue.”

“If we avoid talking about race,” I responded, “we actually deny these young men’s experiences and allow racism to fester.”

He then suggested that my invocation of racism was the only racism these boys experienced within the school system. In his opinion, talking about racism cannot end racism—only God can. He myopically assumed that my identity as a pastor meant I shared his understanding of racism as just another sin, a spiritual condition. Jesus died because sin will never go away; therefore, racism will never go away. With such flagrant pes-

simism and resignation, it is no wonder he held that people only make our racial situation worse by talking about it.

The notion that racism will never end is just one example of what I call White noise: racist ideas, speech, silence, and misrepresentations that protect and perpetuate Whiteness. White noise masks racial realities and allows people, regardless of race, to ignore the call to disrupt systemic and individual racism. In this case, it tells us that racism is not solvable and that talking about it, even in the forms of reparative intercession or racial parrhesia (truth telling), only makes it worse. Our imaginations, so infected by our existing conditions, cancel even the possibility of hope that racism has a death date.

Racial pessimism amounts to a spiritual crisis. It feeds the view that racism is an inextricable feature of the fallen human condition and therefore beyond human correction. We tell ourselves it’s God’s work—it’s not my responsibility. As we cower behind the small print of the bargain, Black students continue to receive lesson plans two grades below their level, groups of Latinx children live hunted by ICE, Trumpism dominates politics in many places, and the racial wealth gap sucks families into a quicksand of nihilism.

When White noise threatens to drown out the hope for social transformation and our capacity to achieve it, we must practice instead what I call “the pulse to risk”: we must risk our own power and privilege to broaden our sacred imagination. We must construct a new social order anchored in human dignity, equality, and sustainability. We must practice an abolitionist spirituality through behaviors that feed countercultural truths and unselfish interactions with those perceived as disposable.

White people must dare to discuss what they are willing to sacrifice—what power and privilege they are willing to give up—in service of sustaining the stated promise of America and living into its founding creeds. Black men must consider what we must give up to advance justice for Black women and the Black queer community. Black middle-class communities must risk their class privilege for poor Black folks. The same holds true for Latinx communities and their various intersecting shades of social life.

*Willie Dwayne Francois III is senior pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church of Pleasantville, New Jersey, and assistant professor of liberation theology at New York Theological Seminary. This article was adapted from his new book, *Silencing White Noise: Six Practices to Overcome Our Inaction on Race*, © 2022. Used by permission of Brazos Press.*



Source images: Getty

The pulse to risk power and privilege is holy, because it puts us in touch with a fuller meaning of humanity. This includes risking our social privileges, including the protections people think they receive in return for their inaction or pretensions to color blindness. For Christians, as Peter Gomes proposed in *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus*, “the question should not be ‘What would Jesus do?’ but rather, more dangerously, ‘What would Jesus have me do?’ The onus is on us.”

Jesus’ manifesto in Luke 4:18–19 confirms the spirituality of justice, the sacredness of the political done humanely. The chief ruler of the synagogue requests that someone from the congregation read a passage from Isaiah. Jesus stands to read: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” He then uses this passage as the basis for his first sermon, foregrounding an agenda designed to impact the lives of the unprotected.

What is radical to us today appeared to pop off the scroll and flow off Jesus’ tongue as normal, a religious-political mainstay. Good news to the poor is anti-poverty economic policies. Setting the captive free is criminal justice reform. Recovery of sight to the blind is guaranteeing affordable health care. Setting the oppressed free is emancipation. Proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor is reparation.

The witness of Jesus the carpenter—steeped in his own formation as a Hebrew devotee to the God of the exodus—compels us to act on behalf of and in solidarity with disinherited, marginalized people. In our time, we need a new exodus—from Whiteness, patriarchy, queer phobias, and poverty, to enumerate only a few. The quiet sympathies of good people will not initiate the emergence of a true public good for all.

Quiet sympathy—disembodied, non-proximal feelings of concern—is a costless response to racism. Sometimes sympathy even unwittingly cooperates with injustice, leaving a significant body count in its wake. Justice, racial or otherwise, is not a feeling but a doing. The spiritual without the political is passive and unproductive. The political without the spiritual is predatory and loveless. Justice is where the spiritual and the political rendezvous.

What does this abolitionist spirituality look like in action? It looks like turning opportunities aside in order to benefit historically underprivileged persons. Or opting out of inclusion when others are excluded or underrepresented, or disassociating from certain networks and persons when our alliances threaten the dignity of others. Some disruptive practices that draw inspiration from abolitionist spirituality include joining nonviolent direct action, advocating for policy change, calling for curricula redevelopment in schools, examining our spheres of influence, educating decision makers according to a liberative vision, and bringing our antiracism to our decision-making roles.

In this way we not only give up racial pessimism, we nurture a sacred intolerance of racism—along with all other forms of oppression—and treat the needs of others as holy.

Abolitionist spirituality also invites us to repair the material and psychic harms inflicted on unprotected racial communities, acknowledging the psychological violence of what I call plantation religion—the use of dogma, ritual, and doctrine to protect White power, a practice still at work in much of Christianity today. We can be careful of the stories we consume and work to create a counternarrative for racial stereotypes, supplanting the centuries-old messages so normalized by media, churches, and curricula. Oppressed people the world over deserve safe

TOMORROW'S THOUGHT LEADERS WILL NEED THE *CENTURY*



Photo © Wavebreakmedia / Getty

Give future Christian leaders access to the magazine that you've valued throughout your ministry by including the *CENTURY* in your will.

You can become part of the Martin E. Marty Legacy Circle by including a bequest to the *CENTURY* in your estate planning. A bequest can allow you to keep control of your assets in your lifetime and support the magazine in the future. Explore the possibilities—talk to a lawyer or financial planner, call us at (312) 263-7510 (ext. 228), or email us at legacy@christiancentury.org.



space—hush harbors in the middle of metropolises of inequality and dread. We work to heal their psychic wounds when we publicly and privately share racial truths unstained by the ugly history we love to forget, when we invest in safe and brave spaces created and operated by unprotected people.


Finally, we must work to give up any attachment to the way things are. After 246 years of forced labor and a soul-shattering relationship with Whiteness, mere freedom for the enslaved was never going to be enough. Abolition requires creative, constructive institutions and new economic arrangements. The abolitionist tradition seeks to broaden democracy and expand the political window of equity and human flourishing. Without a proactive posture toward human becoming, we fail to see big enough ways to give people what they need before they misuse or distort their humanity.

So many people live trapped in place due to what Willie James Jennings calls “a diseased social imagination,” which distorts our perceptions of race and disfigures the lived outcomes of non-White people. The chattel imagination crowns Whiteness as the ideal and perceives Black people as inherently deserving of control, isolation, punishment, inhumanity, and exclusion. The chattel imagination normalizes the ways Black communities endure the unrelenting blows dealt by mass inequities in schools, corporate offices, health companies, and the legal system. Abolitionist spirituality invites us to renew our imagination, language, and actions, believing a sustainable future exists beyond the necessary destruction of the evil we’ve always known. Just because there is no exact, detailed, vivid blueprint for the future does not mean the insidious evils of structural dehumanization and disinheritance should not be dismantled immediately.

Abolition requires creative, constructive institutions and new economic arrangements.

Abolition calls for the end of private and public prisons that irrecoverably extract resources and people out of Black and Brown residential communities. Abolition demands teaching that advances the opportunities of Black and Latinx students as emerging voters and taxpayers. It speaks up for a single-payer health-care system that addresses the disparities that contribute to lower Black and Latinx life expectancies. It communicates a need for a federal job guarantee that requires the US government to create and sustain high-wage employment for everyone who wants a job while honoring the dignity of work and workers.

Abolitionist spirituality urges us to self-sacrifice. We should sacrifice our power and privilege so consistently, intentionally, and freely that it comes to feel like not a sacrifice but a sacrament. Our faith expects and welcomes opposition as a pathway to societal re-creation, an occasion to unlock the power of human resilience sparked by the divini-

ty in us—our *imago Dei*. This is true even when the opposition surfaces from within us. Abolitionist spirituality funds our risks, urging us to do the counterintuitive and self-sacrificial. The succor of our spirituality correlates to the amplitude of our resistance to the status quo. 

On grace in late August

She uses the dishwasher
only to dry what she washes

in the sink. She looks out across
the dry-brown backyard, grass

probably crinkly under foot,
like walking on potato chips

in the carpeted den, just to notice
her son’s square garden, framed

by railroad tie fragments
housing rot and yellow jackets,

with its single jalapeño
or spotted Beefsteak hanging

heavily, waiting for him
to free them from the heat,

from the deer. No one’s around
her now, anywhere near the kitchen,

the sun high, a spotlight, inviting
her gaze on the garden. It will be

years before he confesses
his sins at the counter,

to be absolved, just in front
of this sink where she promises

to wash peppers and tomatoes
that tend to die on the vine

on this heat-drenched square patch
of garden in the back, still

in view, stilled as she hums
hymns and waits for dishes to dry.

Jacob Stratman

Jacob Stratman’s first poetry collection, What I Have I Offer with Two Hands, is a part of the Poiema Poetry Series (Cascade, 2019).



SUNDAY'S COMING

PREMIUM

A paid lectionary resource for preachers and teachers, delivered by email every Monday morning.

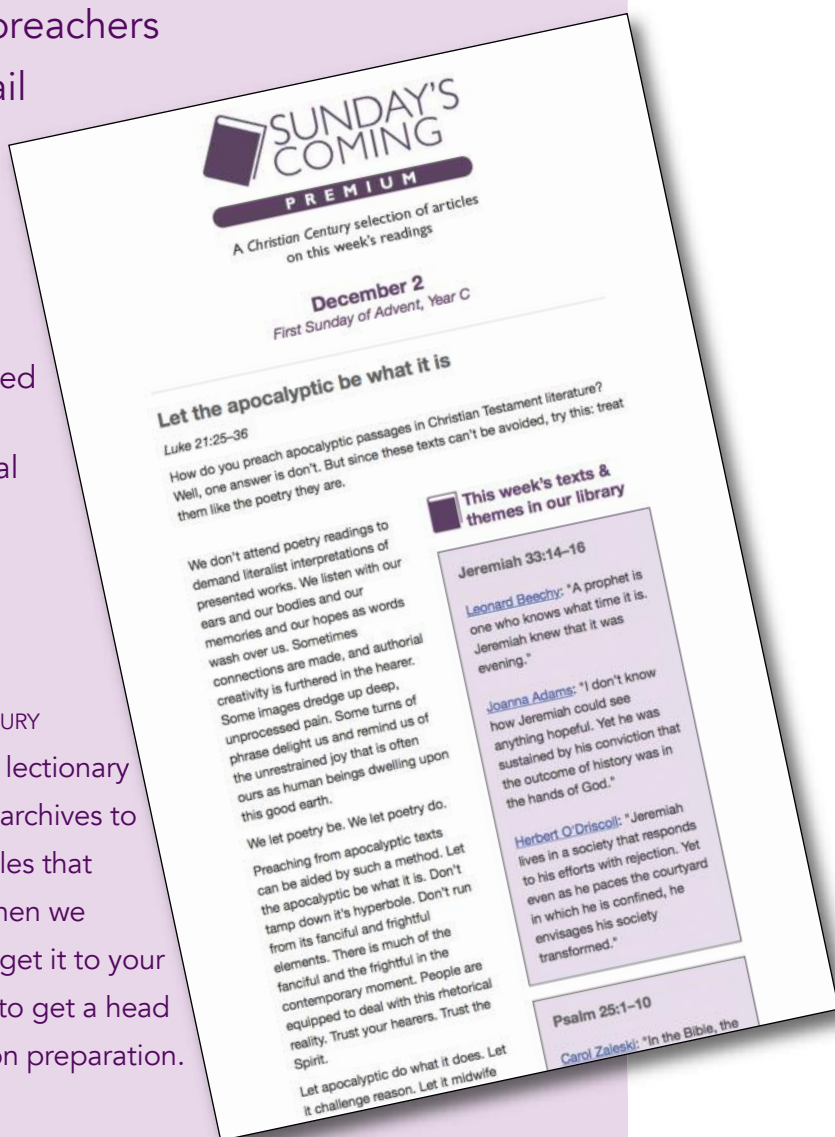
Like the free version of Sunday's Coming, **Sunday's Coming Premium** features handpicked highlights from the CENTURY's collection of writing related to the lectionary—but with many more links, organized by the week's individual texts and themes.

Your lectionary study research assistant

With **Sunday's Coming Premium**, the CENTURY editors do the work of reviewing the week's lectionary readings and sorting through the CENTURY's archives to find commentaries, essays, and feature articles that address the week's readings and themes. Then we organize these into a concise summary and get it to your in-box by Monday morning, in time for you to get a head start on weekly worship planning and sermon preparation.

Just \$4.95 a month

Subscriptions are \$4.95 a month; once you sign up, you'll be billed every month until you decide to cancel, which you can do at any time. Your first issue will arrive on the Monday following your purchase.



Subscribe at christiancentury.org/SCPremium

Resurrecting heaven

I NEED HEAVEN to be real. There, I said it. I'm not sure why I feel embarrassed confessing this. After all, the creed I profess with countless other Christians on Sunday mornings sanctions my belief in "the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." But official creeds are one thing, and the lived reality of faith is another. I know that in many circles belief in a literal afterlife, a literal resurrection, and a literal heaven has fallen out of favor.

I also know that this falling out happened for good reasons. I grew up with pie-in-the-sky theology: the teaching that this earth is not our home and therefore not our concern. I saw the toxic apathy and poor stewardship that emerge from an overemphasis on the hereafter. Why bother fighting pollution, climate change, or species loss if the planet is doomed to burn anyway? Indeed, why bother addressing *any* injustice that plagues humanity if the earth is just a giant waiting room for heaven?

I also recognize how manipulative life-after-death preaching can be. I've heard the fearmongering altar calls, the vivid descriptions of hellfire, the horrible descriptions of "God the righteous judge" that render God cruel, stingy, and vindictive.

And yet, I still need heaven to be real. After two-plus years of a global pandemic, too many mass shootings to count, daily headlines of war, a rapidly worsening climate, increasing economic inequality, ongoing racist violence, and a staggering national crisis of mental health, I need to know that a better world is not just possible but assured. Assured not only for those of us privileged enough to enjoy a fairly comfortable life here on earth, despite its many challenges, but also for those who, despite their fondest hopes and most earnest efforts, will not experience the salvific love, vindication, healing, and justice of God in this life.

The children who have died and will die in elementary school classrooms because the United States worships guns. The millions around the world who died of COVID-19 before vaccines were developed. The Black Americans who live in perpetual fear on our streets. The young people who live under the shadow of mental illnesses that modern medicine can't yet alleviate. Civilian casualties of war. People in chronic pain. People who, for whatever reason, experience life on this earth as burdensome, lonely, terrifying, or hopeless. For all of these people, I need to know that love, hope, and justice are secured by the Christ who died for them, too. That while we have every obligation to alleviate suffering in this world, the salvation of God's precious children does not finally depend upon our clumsy efforts. That the pain of human life matters infinitely to God—so much so that God's working out of healing, equity,

reconciliation, and justice will not end when a human being draws her final breath on this planet. That somehow, somewhere, someday, God will wipe every tear from every eye.

I've spent the past few years bumping up hard against the limits of what we human beings can save by our own efforts. My son has spent five years battling a chronic pain condition that medicine cannot touch. My daughter has struggled for more than a decade with mental health challenges so severe and so unrelenting, she often despairs of living. To be clear: my husband and I will never stop seeking healing for our children in this life. There is no resignation here—we will remain fierce in our efforts to alleviate our family's suffering for as long as we all live.

But we also recognize that our children might spend the whole of their earthly lives fighting without respite against forces that diminish them. We recognize that some things will be lost. For me, the hope of heaven is the guarantee that one day my son will wake up in a pain-free body, that a time will come when my daughter will have the capacity to delight in the singularity of her existence. The hope of heaven is the glimmer of steady light that guides and protects me in the valley of the shadow of death.

I no longer worry that a robust belief in heaven will lead to a lazy escapism. I worry about the opposite: that if the church loses its belief in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, we will also lose the ferocity of our hope, the holy restlessness that leads us to action, the commitment to justice that fuels our prophetic lament, solidarity, resilience, and courage. After all, how will we pray for God's kingdom to come, how will we credibly usher in that kingdom in whatever small ways we can here and now, if we don't believe in its ultimate fulfillment?

Sometimes I wonder if the church's witness is failing because we don't know how to translate a theology of heaven for the times we live in. Our culture's images of heaven are so saccharine, so sentimental, so boring. What would it be like to move beyond clouds, harps, and chubby baby angels? To hold out the possibility of actual peace, reconciliation, and abundance for all?

To affirm the truth of heaven is to fire our spiritual imaginations for this life. To remind us of why we endure. To resist the binaries of faith or action, hope or engagement, and to live richly into the paradox that the kingdom of God is both here and coming, both within us and beyond us. To insist that our desire to flourish is a God-given, holy desire rooted in the promise of a life to come.

Debie Thomas is minister of lifelong formation at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Palo Alto, California.

IN Review

A way forward from the South

by Richard Lischer

Imagine taking a bus tour of approximately one-third of the United States with a guide who not only knows the history of everything she is showing you but has absorbed her material with such passion that the tour has become a testimonial. *South to America* is no ordinary travel book, and Imani Perry, a writer perhaps best known for her biography of playwright Lorraine Hansberry, *Looking for Lorraine*, is no ordinary tour guide.

Each chapter shows the unique character of a region or city in the American South, with a final chapter on the Bahamas and Havana, Cuba, completing the journey. Perry begins in Appalachia and shuttles down to Maryland, DC, Virginia, and Louisville—all Upper South enclaves. Then she moves through Alabama (her home state), Mississippi, Tobacco Road, the Sea Islands, Savannah, Charleston, Atlanta, Memphis's Beale Street, and the peculiar American crescent known as the Black Belt. From there it's on to the low countries of Florida, Mobile, and New Orleans.

The chapters explore the distinctive qualities of each place, but together they stand for something larger and more original than themselves. They are *the* South. As the journey proceeds, Perry reveals the South's formative role in shaping the essence, or soul, of all that America has become. She grieves the thefts that can never be returned: neighborhood schools short on books and computers, endowment-starved historically Black colleges and universities, traditional communities either gentrified and yuppified or cut in two by free-ways, professions largely closed to

Black people, land promised but never given. The fabric of the South has been torn and bled out, yet it survives as a witness to something more than survival. At our nation's crossroads, struggling as we are with new forms of old hate, the South signifies a way forward for us all.

Beyond its historical and geographical markers, the American South is also an intuition. We can't define it, but we know it when we see it. Occasionally, Perry asks the people she interviews, What does this place feel like to you? To one person DC feels like the South, to another it does not. Virginia Beach, located at the southern tip of a southern state, has never felt like the South to me, while the river town of Cairo, Illinois, located in a midwestern, historically free state, definitely does. To Perry, Princeton feels like the South, probably because she teaches at a gorgeous university with echoes of the plantation still about it. Her purpose, however, is not to define the attributes of southern sensibility but to connect with the stories and feelings of others, and always to share her own.

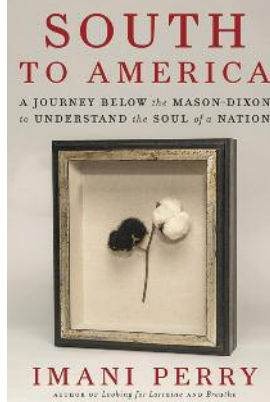
This book is a kind of Wikipedia of the South. Who knew about postwar Nazism in Jim Crow Alabama? Or Florida's "cracker architecture," or the surveying team of Mr. Mason and Mr. Dixon, or the sweet dress Carlotta Walls wore on the day she helped integrate Central High School in Little Rock? This information can be summarized, but what makes the book sing is Perry's voice. It is open, sharp, generous, and endlessly inquisitive.

It is also deeply interactive. In the

South to America: A Journey below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation
By Imani Perry
Ecco, 432 pp., \$35.99

chapter on Savannah, for example, Perry meets and is befriended by Walter Evans, a surgeon and collector of African American art and artifacts, and his wife, Linda, who is from "Alabama North" (aka Detroit). She feels at home in their Low Country house with its high ceilings and big windows. It is nestled in live oak and Spanish moss, which takes her back to an earlier visit as a teen when she was first enthralled by the city's "mythical" moss. Everything in the chapter radiates from this house. At dinner, her host leads a discussion of his childhood home of Beaufort, South Carolina, "the most beautiful city in the United States," and explains how it happened that a young Howard University graduate became both an authority on art and a surgeon. The ever-present spirits of W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black power preacher Albert Cleage hover over the conversation.

Later, a walk through the squares takes her past the childhood home of Flannery O'Connor, whose private disparagement of Black people disqualifies her as a "local saint." Perry imagines O'Connor in a conversation with another Savannah resident, the Black trans



Richard Lischer's new book, *Our Hearts Are Restless: The Art of Spiritual Memoir*, will be released by Oxford University Press in December.

icon Lady Chablis. (Their meeting does not go well.) After walking to First African Baptist Church, the oldest Black church in North America, Perry embarks upon a conversation with two Black women who are Jehovah's Witnesses. The depths of Savannah contrast with Perry's earlier assessment of "Hotlanta" with its superficial shine. ("Atlanta makes it obvious that being American is being a trickster.") This little summary of one chapter only hints at the rich mixture of history and humanity that spills off the pages of this book.

Everywhere Perry grieves Black enslavement, exclusion, and deprivation—and everywhere she finds something to celebrate. In Memphis, she remarks on the gentrifying of the city's Black identity, though its music remains. She adds:

Just remember, the sounds of this nation that captured the whole world were born out of repression. Up from the gutbucket, as it were. You know the song, maybe even the story, but I want you to study its provenance. Because it belongs to you, too. And so you are implicated; we all are. But will you serve as a witness?

Remarking on Elvis Presley's indebtedness to Black music, she names one of his counterparts. Did Elvis steal Little Richard's thunder? I don't know myself, but Perry argues Richard Penniman's case in a way that makes it a symbol of the greater theft of Black culture by White dominance.

She knows rock 'n' roll, jazz, gospel, bebop, rap, and hip-hop, but she saves her best eloquence for the music that cannot be stolen: the blues. Driving the Mississippi Blues Trail, she muses on the difference between the Parchman Farm blues (born of despair in the most notorious penitentiary in the history of the South) and the plantation songs that echo a different despair but help the work go by. The blues are songs of the interior, born of common memories, hurts, and hopes that can never be realized. She remarks, "A good time doesn't require abandonment of the hard time that settles inside your chest. Forever. This is what I think the blues are." They

are shut away from the American dream, but they dream anyway.

Perry doesn't wonder why Black folks left the South; she asks why they stayed. Her answer is "home." If everyone had left, who would have remained to tend the ancestors' graves? This reminds me of the poignant scene in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* when young Harriet Jacobs goes to her parents' graves to ask their permission before running away. Perry venerates all who, like her, have taken the road away from the South and brought it with them. But she honors just as deeply those who have stayed.

I expected religion to play a more visible part in *South to America*. Martin Luther King Jr. seemed determined to shape the civil rights movement in the mirror of the Bible, whose characters and message he brilliantly illumined in his South. His ministry conjured deliverance as a decisive act, a win. Perry's stories tend to slow it down. She lifts up many crucifixions—the hidden ones—as well as evidence of victories in progress. The phrase "Understand the Soul of a Nation" in Perry's subtitle is a subtle play on the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's motto, "Redeeming the Soul of America."

Still, Perry understands with King what befell the biblical God in the South: how that God was captured and defrauded of his own justice and dearest people. In fact, she sees two gods, the one of the masters and the one of the enslaved. She asks, as King did when he observed the lovely steeples and manicured lawns of Birmingham's White churches, "Who is their God?"

She sees White dominion for what it was and is: a grotesque article of faith. It is a doctrine of cleanliness that its adherents will defend by means of the filthiest of tactics. She counters:

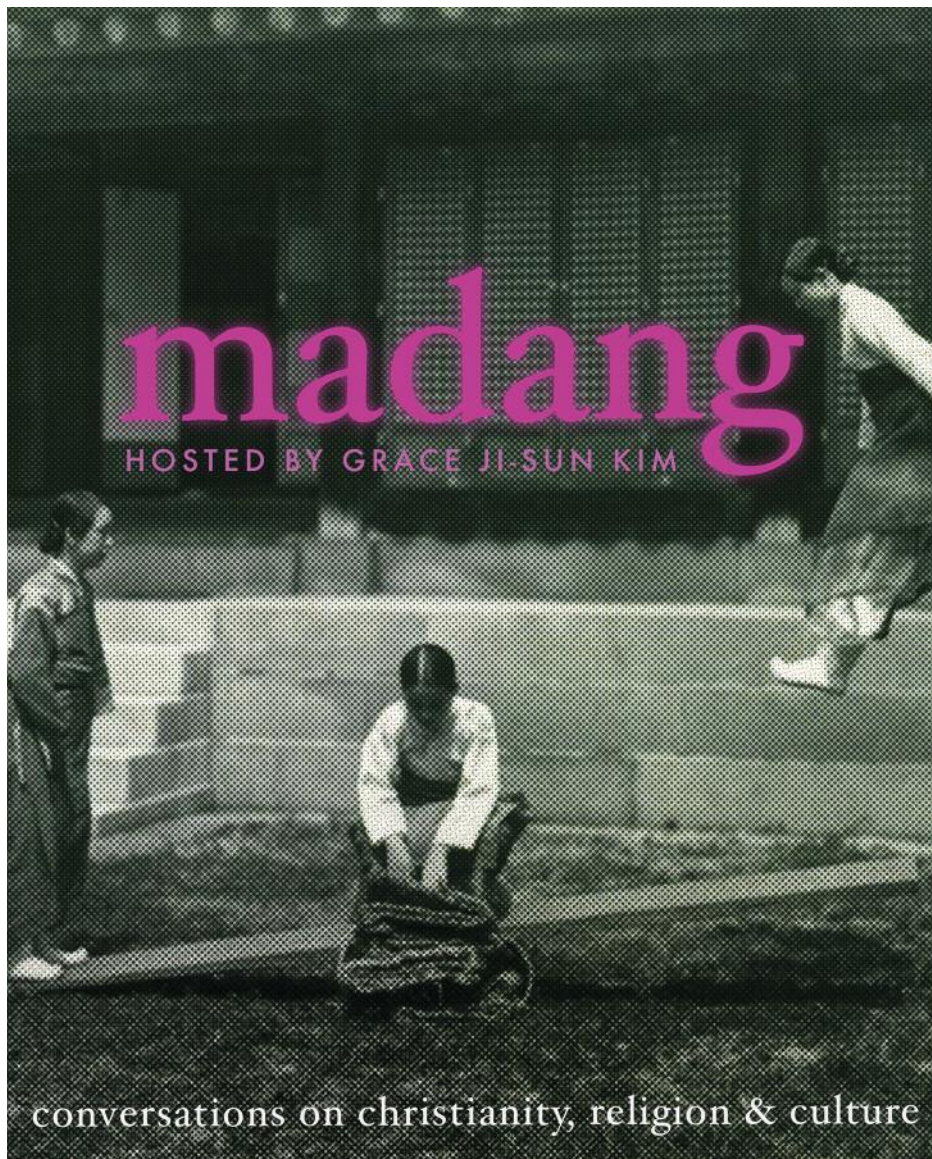
The God I was taught to believe in, a God rendered by the enslaved, was and remains at odds with that God. The God we'd been taught was the God of Exodus, the one who thundered "Let my people go." Our God saw Caesar's way was wrong, not because of who was on top and who

READ. SHARE. SUPPORT THE CENTURY.

**Help us guarantee
that the CENTURY
will reach future
generations.**

- Give a onetime gift to the CENTURY.
- Become a CENTURY associate.
- Include the CENTURY in your will and estate plans.

For more information, contact
Heidi Baumgaertner by email at
advert@christiancentury.org
or by phone at (312) 263-7510 ext. 229.



christiancentury.org/madang

A podcast hosted by the
Christian Century



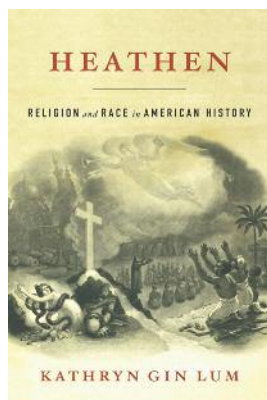
was on the bottom, but because of the addiction to the idea of top and bottom, and the sin of working people to death, and the crises of vice and viciousness.

So many have been crushed by the God of the masters. Perry is open to the grace of God, but she also honors the spiritualities of those for whom grace has taken a different turn, in artistic achievement and even conjure and hoodoo. She writes, “As much as we want articles of faith to tell our stories, the most important thing is to be honest that they don’t tell them all.”

In her chapter on the Black Belt, the region in which people were the poorest and their chances of being lynched the greatest, Perry ventures a heartfelt, if familiar, challenge to the moral imagination. “We must become different kinds of people in relation to one another . . . people suited to the society we want to create.” One thinks of a similar comment by James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time*, following his own journey into the deep South: “We, the black and white, deeply need each other . . . if we are really, that is, to achieve our identity, our maturity as men and women.”

South to America is not a book about religion, but it is a religious book. It is a book of finding. One of its findings is the racism that lies so near the heart of America—and not merely in the culture of the South, but in the sacred documents and original polity of the nation. Perry’s comments on Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*—in which he goes to some lengths to demean the intelligence of the people he owns—remind us that White supremacy is not an accident of our history or a recent aberration.

As Perry insists, we should not pretend that White supremacy is “merely a part of the nation’s genealogy, but not its soul.” The enormity of its stain confronts each succeeding generation. Paradoxically, that very sin also magnifies the ongoing achievements of beauty, courage, and hope among African Americans of all generations. Depending on one’s notion of how salvation happens in history—and in our particular history—*South to America* honors the complexities of getting saved in America.



Heathen: Religion and Race in American History

By Kathryn Gin Lum

Harvard University Press, 368 pp., \$35.00

Kathryn Gin Lum traces the American theory of the heathen, a word chosen deliberately for its negative and archaic quality. Heathens, according to a common and very powerful historical view, constitute an alarmingly large part of the world's population.

Beyond their spiritual ignorance, they suffer from grave physical and mental inferiority, and they have no hope of raising themselves by their own efforts. They can be elevated only by the dedicated and benevolent work of their superiors, who are White and Christian—and overwhelmingly Protestant. As they rise to accept the standards of that higher breed, suitably improved heathens can begin to make their way in the world. The goal of helping and improving these inferiors, whether they seek out such aid or not, is a fundamental building block of American ideology.

I am oversimplifying a complex argument, but this sketch gets to two other key points of Gin Lum's argument. The first is the very early and constant overlap between race and religion in the US Christian vision. Despite some claims to the contrary, American views of the inferior outside world do not segue from religious to racial stereotypes; instead, the two are all but indistinguishable all along. Second, Gin Lum argues that this con-

cept of the heathen is still very much alive and well, long after the actual vocabulary has become tainted and obsolete. It manifests in the easy and widely accepted division of the world into the fortunate and the benighted, which over the past century has usually been detached from explicitly religious groundings. We see it, for instance, in the language of the "third world." The approach is fundamentally infantilizing.

Gin Lum's work ranges broadly across authors and genres, particularly as she highlights figures who appropriated the heathen label for their own purposes in order to turn it back against the White empires. She makes skillful use of such powerful writers as the Yankton Dakota author Zitkála-Šá and Martinique's Aimé Césaire.

This broad scope allows her to cover

Reviewed by Philip Jenkins, who teaches at Baylor University. His latest book is Climate, Catastrophe, and Faith: How Changes in Climate Drive Religious Upheaval.

CALVIN INSTITUTE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Foster well-grounded worship in your community.

The Vital Worship Grants Program serves worshipers throughout Canada and the US. Grants have been awarded across the spectrum of Christian traditions, including , Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, and Non-Denominational communities.

worship.calvin.edu/grants



Grants to **WORSHIPING COMMUNITIES** focus on projects that connect worship to intergenerational or intercultural faith formation and Christian discipleship.

Grants to **TEACHER-SCHOLARS** focus on integrated research projects that connect Christian worship with other disciplines of study and practice.

These grants are made possible through the generous support of Lilly Endowment Inc.

themes and approaches that would have escaped the attention of a less ambitious scholar. For instance, Gin Lum stresses the importance of anti-Catholicism in the story she tells, incorporating it extensively and thoughtfully. It's a crucial topic because it illustrates the application of primitive and non-White heathen stereotypes to peoples who would, over time, gain fully White status in the American social order. This demonstrates the highly fluid nature of such categories: Whiteness changes and evolves, and so does heathendom.

Heathen offers a dazzling range of examples to substantiate its thesis. Rare is the reader who could dip into it without becoming much better informed on a great many topics historical, literary, and religious. So many of Gin Lum's examples are enlightening and informative in their own right.

I inevitably had some disagreements. When I teach about global Christianity, I often use Charlotte Brontë's 1846 poem "The Missionary" to explain what drove

those evangelistic endeavors. The poem perfectly epitomizes the view of those overseas races as "the weak, trampled by the strong," who "live but to suffer—hopeless die." They are subject to "pagan-priests, whose creed is Wrong, / Extortion, Lust, and Cruelty," until they can be liberated by White Christians. This is exactly the thought world of *Heathen*, and the poem vividly illustrates the overlap of racist and anti-Catholic rhetoric.

Quite reasonably, Gin Lum does not quote Brontë's poem, because it is not American and therefore falls outside her purview. But that in itself raises an issue. Are the attitudes and concepts explored in *Heathen* in fact distinctively American, or did they rather belong to a much broader phenomenon which was more generically Protestant—emphatically British, but also German and Northern European?

But surely we would also find very much the same ideas among Catholic imperial and missionary powers, especially the French and Belgians. It was these ideas, above all those of imperial France, that provoked the ferocious responses that Gin Lum quotes at some length from Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, even if those authors did on occasion throw in obligatory denunciations of the United States. From an African or Caribbean perspective, it was the European (and European Christian) views of heathens that mattered, and it is confusing to see anti-colonial responses presented here as if they were specifical-

ly blows against American empire. For those reasons, I do not agree with Gin Lum's portrait of the American trajectory as in any way exceptional.

Heathen must also make the reader think carefully about "helping" in general. The author's complaint is that the American impulse to help inevitably casts the rest of the world as helpless, needy, and awaiting uplift. But surely, whether we are looking at the world of 1860 or 1960 or 2022, a very substantial chasm really did (and does) separate different regions of the world in terms of wealth, power, and access to resources. That global gulf can be measured by any number of objective measures. Whatever we call them, very poor nations suffer multiple kinds of deprivation, which are long forgotten in the world of the WEIRD—Western, educated, industrial, rich, and democratic.

Gin Lum is absolutely correct to reject the idea that the poor heathens cannot lift themselves by their own unassisted endeavors. Of course they can: just look at some of the so-called third world nations of the 1960s, such as South Korea, Taiwan, and China. But what are the proper obligations of the United States, and the rest of the WEIRD world, to the still extremely poor? Can development work legitimately help, free of racial condescension? How should nations like the United States reconceive their efforts to help? And what might be the proper place of Christian churches and missions in any such enterprise?

The Promising Community: Can I Get A Witness?

Elizabeth Eaton

Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Mary Hinkle Shore

Dean, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

Kathryn Kleinhans

Dean, Trinity Lutheran Seminary

January 22-25, 2023

Belleville, Illinois (St. Louis)

An in-person seminar for pastors, seminary students, and lay leaders—with an online option

crossings.org/conference

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE



CROSSINGS
WHERE THE GOSPEL MEETS OUR DAILY LIVES

MOVING?

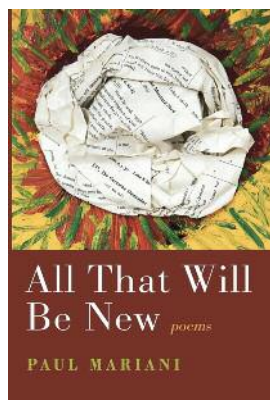


If you've moved or are planning to move, please let us know.

Go to the subscriber services page at christiancentury.org or give us a call at 1 (800) 208-4097.

Please allow six to eight weeks for an address change to become effective.

THE Christian SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES
CENTURY



All That Will Be New: Poems

By Paul Mariani

Slant Books, 84 pp., \$25.00

A distinguished man of letters, Paul Mariani gives us his ninth book of poems, which is perhaps his most compelling and most profound. One of his earlier volumes was entitled *Epitaphs for the Journey*, and now that journey is nearing its end as Mariani “raises unanswered questions you do not dare to ask” about how we “get to the other side . . . we are destined for.” In his early 80s, he acknowledges, “the sands in my own hourglass are nearly gone.”

The quintessential narrator, Mariani has many stories to tell of his long, fruitful life. Many of the “unanswered questions” he asks are found in this dazzling array of poems—elegiac, ekphrastic, panegyric, pastoral, lyrical, meditative—written in iambic pentameter, free verse, and even Dante’s terza rima. Just as powerfully diverse are the topics Mariani explores, from his *ars poetica*—painting—to nature in all its manifestations, from heroes like Harriet Tubman and Malcolm X to a catastrophe like COVID.

Not surprisingly, one of the first places Mariani raises questions is in his stunning handful of ekphrastic poems, where he helps readers see inside a painting (and often its artist’s life) but also shows how the painting reads us. Of Picasso’s *Guernica*, Mariani asks, “Pilgrim, what shall we make of all this.” In Georges de La Tour’s *Joseph the Carpenter*, Mariani shows how the mortal and divine coexist in love. “Out of the darkness behind the man who turns the augur into wood,” symbolizing a tau cross, we see the boy

Jesus holding a candle that seems to pass “radiantly . . . through [his] outstretched hand.” This light radiates Jesus’ face as he helps Joseph, the protector and nurturer, a model of earthly obedience.

In Bastien-Lepage’s painting *Poor Fauvette*, the little girl reveals a “gaze” which elicits our sympathy, “before you too find yourself likewise turning away” in tears, as Mariani does when he runs into an old friend’s daughter after mass, her face masked but wounded by a “rift” with her brother.

Again, in “Wheat Fields Filled with Cypressess,” Mariani links Van Gogh’s “blue impastoed” sky with its “mottled clouds” to the “paint-daubed clouds” that Gerard Manley Hopkins saw in Dublin “with his own end coming on.” Mariani then connects these images in this minor masterpiece with the parable of the sower, emphasizing how painter, poet-priest, and Mariani himself soldier down life’s “darkening fields.” Countering contemporary critics’ view that Seurat’s pointillist *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* was irreligious or tasteless, Mariani agrees with the artist that all is “floating here / as if frozen in eternity, coalescing in harmonies of endless dots,” revealing “an Eden like nothing anyone has seen before.”

But if Seurat shows us Eden, Picasso shows us hell. Here is Mariani’s haunting first line: “Like war itself, the painting will swallow you.” So do Mariani’s descriptions of Picasso’s apocalyptic images: a “howling Pieta,” a Holy Ghost (dove) that “cries out in anguish,” the gore of a “disembodied head,” and a crumpled soldier, “his eyes askew in death.” In the end, though, the last two ekphrastic poems, on Caravaggio’s *The Calling of St. Matthew* and *Supper at Emmaus*, sum up the Christian hope and love that animates Mariani’s canon. Like the apostles, we are summoned through Mariani’s poems on Caravaggio, however shaken up we are “by what is really happening before our eyes.”

Mariani seeks wisdom among his “beloved ghosts” too, including those generations of his family “who lie silently

somewhere in my blood.” There are also poems about his lifelong literary friends, Philip Levine, the unbeliever who could recite Dylan Thomas’s “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” so movingly that he “could turn even an agnostic into a believer,” and Bob Pack, another doubter, whose conversations with Mariani sounded like “two rabbis” through which “blessed banter flows.” Mariani looks forward to laughing with them again when they cross the great divide. And then there’s the poem about the saintly Margaret—who, on the brink of crossing over, finds Mariani’s wife, Eileen, telling her that they’ll have lunch together “on the other side.” For Mariani does not invoke death without a resurrection.

The tour de force of *All That Will Be New* is the five-page “A Periplus of Poets,” Mariani’s Dantesque poem beginning with his “turning from the dark” to see “a light coming toward me.” It is his deceased teacher and mentor Allen Mandelbaum. Like Virgil, Mandelbaum introduces to Mariani all the poets whose

MISSING AN ISSUE?

Contact CHRISTIAN CENTURY subscription services for back issues.
Call (800) 208-4097 or go to our website: christiancentury.org.



Reviewed by Philip C. Kolin, a poet whose latest collection is *Americorona: Poems about the Pandemic*.



contemplating now.

A podcast exploring
the intersection of
**contemplation &
social justice**

with Cassidy Hall

Hosted by the *Christian Century*



FEATURING:

Therese Taylor-Stinson • Dr. Lerita Coleman Brown • Zenju Earthlyn Manuel • Dr. Anthea Butler
Dr. Angela N. Parker • Rev. Dr. Pamela Lightsey • Sister Barbara Jean LaRochester
Bishop Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows • Sophronia Scott • Dr. Leah Gunning Francis • Dr. Elyse Ambrose
Davelyn Hill • Dr. Christena Cleveland • Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis • Dr. Kimberly D. Russaw • Cole Arthur Riley



Listen on
Google Podcasts



Listen on
Spotify



Listen on
Apple Podcasts

biographies he has written after spending “years searching for a reality” among “those precious scraps they left.” Mariani could make no stronger statement about the role that *ars poetica* played in all those “unanswered questions” to which he seeks answers. Among the parade of ghostly writers are Wallace Stevens, John Berryman, the “Jersey Doctor” William Carlos Williams (who in another poem Mariani extols for getting life right, “which still moves me all these years”), the “raw-nerved Robert Lowell,” Hart Crane, and Hopkins, who created beauty out of life’s “blue bleak embers,” lifting Mariani’s imagination to offer him “consolation.”

Running through these poems is Mariani’s keen description of and profound reflection on nature, with both its pined splendor and its tumultuous power. Like the paintings and poems that have been central to his life, the natural world also unlocks the glory of the Divine. “God’s creation, all of it so good, so very good.” Trees, rivers, birds, and flowers bear the imprint of holiness in Mariani’s poems. The 131-year-old catalpa outside his house is likened to “a silent guardian angel,” the snow moon over Singer Island reminds him of “the host the priest raises,” and every tree and leaf are “part of God’s mysterious flower.”

Leaves hold a special place in creation for Mariani. “Think how in time these branches will shake / their way to bud and leaf again come spring.” What nature awaits is also what waits for humanity: renewal and redemption. So central are leaves that a world lacking them would be “like words gone silent as they lose their way.” Mariani’s leaves, of course, as for Walt Whitman, are the pages of his books filled with words that have not lost their way.

But *All That Will Be New* does not omit the relentless tragedies of life, such as the blight of the coronavirus, the harrowing journey of the Black Moses, Harriet Tubman, or the “primordial tensions of those natural forces” such as the tumultuous waves in the “vast Atlantic” “crashing in to smash against the jagged granite shore” and the “silver glitter spume that explodes” which is “as old and now instant as the whirlwind confronting Job.” With Job, Mariani has tried to hold steady the course toward salvation.

BookMarks

The Hunger for Home: Food and Meals in the Gospel of Luke

By Matthew Croasmun and Miroslav Volf
Baylor University Press, 120 pp., \$17.99

In this short text, Matthew Croasmun and Miroslav Volf take up the theme of food in Luke’s Gospel to uncover a vision of meals as paradigmatic instances of homecoming. Through the ritual of a shared meal, different people and places converge around the presence of God—and a kind of realized eschatology emerges in the process. At once theologically constructive and historically inflected, this text is versatile: it would serve well both as the centerpiece of an adult education series and as devotional literature for individual readers.

With or Without Me: A Memoir of Losing and Finding

By Esther Maria Magnis,
translated by Alta L. Price
Plough Publishing House, 201 pp.,
\$17.99 paperback

Esther Maria Magnis addresses traditional philosophy and religion head on in this unflinching memoir, which details her difficult sojourn away from the Christian faith and then back to it. Amid the spate of personal deconstruction narratives of the past few years, readers will appreciate this German author’s distinct perspective. *With or Without Me* is essential reading for anyone who has ever doubted God’s goodness in the midst of personal loss.

Ten Lives, Ten Demands: Life-and-Death Stories, and a Black Activist’s Blueprint for Racial Justice

By Solomon Jones
Beacon Press, 184 pp., \$22.00

Journalist and activist Solomon Jones grew up during the height of the “war

on drugs,” and his mugshot aired on TV during the Reagan administration’s campaign against crack cocaine use. In this book, Jones reflects on the unjust killing of ten Black people by police, pairing each death with a demand that aims to address the root problem behind it. For example, George Floyd was accused of using a counterfeit bill at the grocery store; Jones’s corresponding demand is the payment of reparations to Black people and communities that have been harmed by legalized racism.

Everyday Contemplative: The Way of Prayerful Living

By L. Roger Owens
Upper Room Books, 160 pp., \$14.99 paperback

For those who want to learn more about what it means to live like a contemplative, this practical book extends an invitation to a more “open, available, and responsive” life with God. United Methodist ministry professor Roger Owens challenges the clichés surrounding contemplation, revealing an everyday approach to prayer which anyone can take up. Prayer prompts, reflection questions, and “Try This” exercises are scattered throughout the book, making it a great introduction to “the way of prayerful living.”

After Pestilence: An Interreligious Theology of the Poor

By Mario I. Aguilar
SCM Press, 224 pp., \$40.00 paperback

Drawing together liberation theology with groundbreaking social science research on the consequences of COVID-19, this important book challenges Christians to put “liberating praxis” ahead of theology and pursue a collective response to the failures of colonialism. Mario Aguilar blends a variety of genres—including formal research on poverty isolation in India and first-person accounts of lockdown in Chile—as he challenges majority-world Christians to break with the status quo, learn from the global poor, and take up prophetic resistance.

by Kathryn Reklis

Scales of time

When my oldest child was seven or eight, I used to come into the kitchen in the early morning to find him already awake looking through dinosaur books, his favorite a now out-of-print book called *A Gallery of Dinosaurs and Other Early Reptiles* by David Peters. Unlike most books aimed at kids, this one was full of detailed descriptions of various species' physical features and social behaviors written in serious prose for a general adult reader. For over a year, my son read and wanted to be read to from this book. It led him to ask me things like, "Mom, what is your favorite ankylosaur from the late Jurassic period?" or "How different were archosaurs from dinosaurs?" while I scrambled to pour myself a cup of coffee.

By the time he was old enough to watch *Jurassic Park* he'd mostly outgrown this dino obsession. But even 25 years after its making, Steven Spielberg's 1993 movie perfectly captured the sheer wonder of a nerdy kid stumbling into a world where all those glorious creatures in your favorite book have come to life. And, of course, the sheer terror of realizing what it would be like to be trapped inside a park with them.

By the time my son watched *Jurassic Park*, the franchise had already produced two sequels and was spawning a second incarnation—the *Jurassic World* saga, the third and supposedly final of which—*Jurassic World Dominion* (directed by Colin Trevorrow)—arrived in theaters this summer.

The *Jurassic World* films are cheekily self-aware of their predecessors. A successful new theme park has risen from the ashes and bones of the first, but (wouldn't you know?) scientific hubris, military overreach, and plain old greed produce a series of terrible human choices, which conspire with the natural instincts of the dinosaurs, who do terrifying dinosaur things, and so the second park goes the way of the first. By the final movie, the dinosaurs are scattered around the globe, some integrating into local habitats, some continuing to wreak havoc, while a suspicious new biotech conglomerate promises to contain and study them. Our heroes—who have

reunited across all the films—have to figure out what nefarious things the scientists are plotting for profit and how to stop them. They do this while escaping, once again, predatory dinosaurs who crash through thick jungles and show off some new creature features.

The first *Jurassic Park* movie embedded in its action sequences big philosophical questions about the limits of science and the dangers of trying to control nature, and it argued its position with razor-sharp claws and clever velociraptors. The newest *Jurassic World* movie could have asked even more urgent questions about how we might learn to live with disasters of our own making,



META-MOMENT: A *T. rex* stalks her prey through a drive-in movie in *Jurassic World Dominion*, the latest film in the long-running series.

Kathryn Reklis teaches theology at Fordham University.

but the movie transfers the drama from the dinosaurs let loose on the world to a half-baked plot about crop failures that is resolved so blithely it barely registers as a threat. By the end, we have lost the fear and wonder of the dinosaurs—who seem like CGI extras in their own movie—and the biting commentary about our own hubris.

What *Jurassic World* seems to have forgotten is what any dino-obsessed kid can tell you: one of the delights of dinosaur nerdery is imagining the world without humans. Dinosaurs are enticing in part because we are separated from them by an inconceivable distance of time. Apple TV+'s new limited series *Prehistoric Planet* uses the same advanced CGI technology as the *Jurassic* franchise to re-create this world in all its startling otherness.

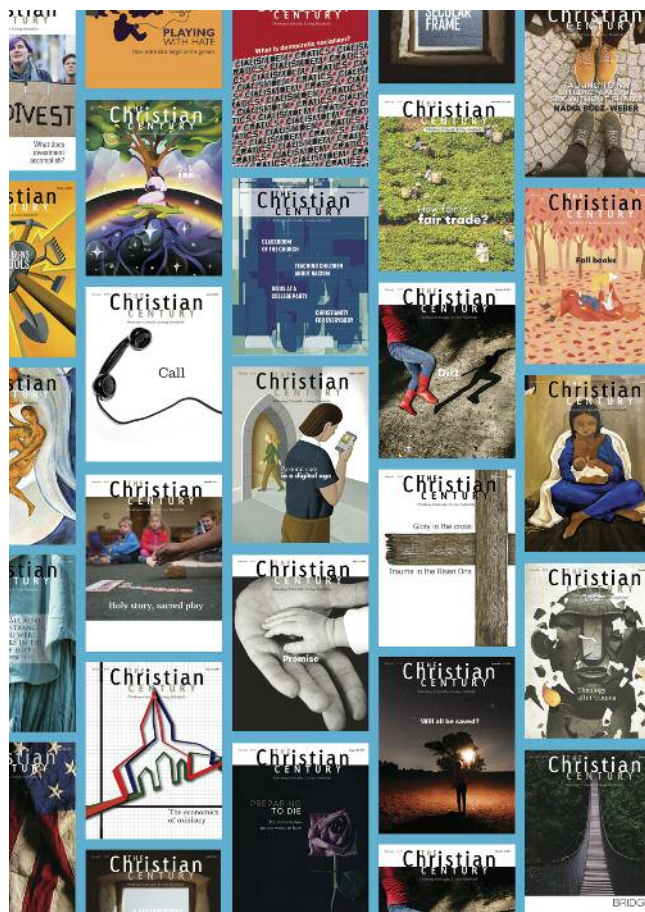
Narrated by David Attenborough, the voice of many BBC nature documentaries, the five-part series imbues these imaginary reproductions with a lavish realism that makes it hard to remember that what you are watching is not patient-

ly filmed nature footage but computer-generated speculation. On a rainy Saturday, my kids and I curled up on the couch and marveled at the parenting skills of the *tuarangisaurus*, the adorable mimicry of baby *T. rexes* trying to copy their father, and the herd behaviors of the *triceratops*. Even my 12-year-old emerged from his new obsessions with NBA statistics and Fortnite skins to get lost in snow-covered forests from 66 million years ago and try to remember the facts he used to patiently recite about duck-billed and armor-plated dinosaurs.

Lured into this strange and wondrous world, I thought of the impossible scales of time such fictions make plain to us. How does one really fathom a difference measured in millions of years? We have a hard time taking the measure of our own history from even a hundred years ago. I felt the planetary scale of my world expand to something larger, vaster, stranger, and more majestic than the small circuits of daily life could ever suggest. Yet, in an even more mind-boggling paradox, the daily circuits of postindus-

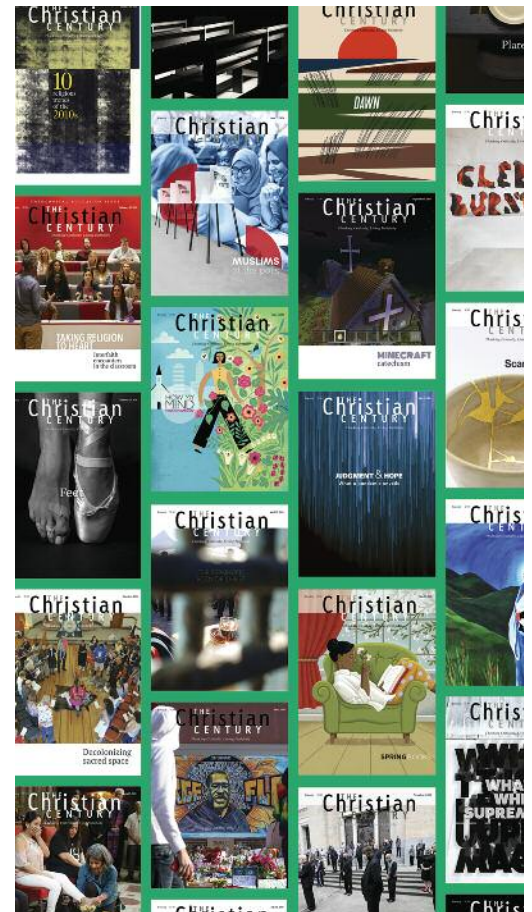
trial life are quite literally collapsing that vast timescale every day: our fossil fuels may not come from actual dinosaur fossils, but they represent the accumulation of millions of years of organic life consumed, comparatively, in the mere blink of an eye.

I kept thinking of the now-iconic scene from the original *Jurassic Park* movie where the heroes try to outrun a *T. rex* in a jeep, its razor-sharp teeth almost touching the side mirror, while the camera focuses on the words “objects in mirror are closer than they appear.” In our modern fascination with dinosaurs, the scales of time are both stretched beyond our comprehension and brought perilously near. A thread runs through dinosaur stories, connecting us nostalgically to our childhoods and our children back through the vast timescales of our planet, for most of which our species plays no part. There is a wistful wonder in that reality—life will find a way even if it is not human life—but maybe also an invitation to reorient ourselves in time while there is still time.



SUBSCRIBE
to the
CHRISTIAN CENTURY

Visit:
christiancentury.org/subscribe
Order by phone: (800) 208-4097



CLASSIFIED

RATES: \$1.75 a word, ten-word minimum. Phone numbers, email addresses, and URLs count as two words; zip codes count as one word. All ads must be prepaid; deadline is four weeks prior to issue date. Please send ads to advert@christiancentury.org or Classified Department, The Christian Century, 104 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1100, Chicago, IL 60603. To inquire about display ads or online advertising, contact the advertising department at (312) 263-7510, x229, or advert@christiancentury.org.

AVAILABLE

VISITING NEW YORK? Interested in biblical archaeology? Visit BiblicalArcheologyAtTheMet.org.

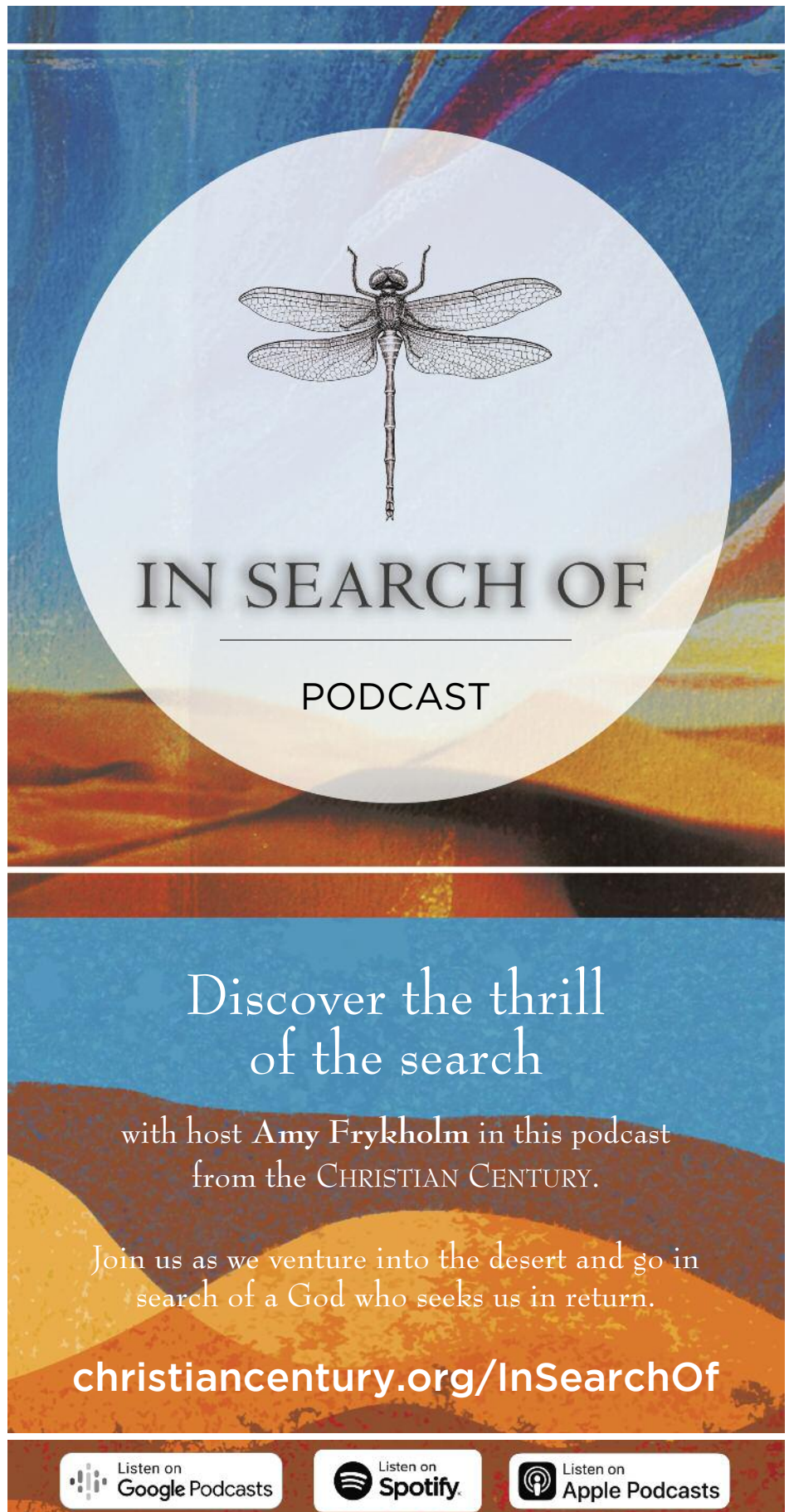
POSITIONS AVAILABLE

First Congregational United Church of Christ in Rapid City, SD, seeks their new FULL-TIME PASTOR: an effective teacher/preacher, a compassionate and caring individual, and a person with visionary leadership. Find us at <http://rcfirstucc.com>. Email: uccoffice@rushmore.com. (605) 342-5787.

Seeking a NEW PASTOR—Rye Congregational Church (RCC), a faith-filled community of about 100 members, is seeking a new pastor. Located in the heart of the coastal town of Rye, NH, RCC is an independent, nondenominational church with roots dating back to 1726. Our ideal candidate would have a minimum of five years of pastoral experience, a strong and deep knowledge of the Bible, and embody a shepherding spirit. They will inspire through a traditional worship service anchored by a compelling Bible-based sermon with a nonpolitical, but relevant message for today. RCC is ready for fresh ideas as we enter a new chapter in our history. We are eager to see growth in membership, the return of young families and youthful energy to the church. This is a great opportunity for a collaborative leader to become an integral part of our church family and lead us on our faith journey. Please send resumes to rcsearch22@gmail.com. For more information on RCC, please visit www.ryecongregational.com.

ADVERTISE HERE

To contact our advertising department, call (312) 263-7510, ext. 229 or email: advert@christiancentury.org.



IN SEARCH OF


PODCAST


Discover the thrill
of the search


with host Amy Frykholm in this podcast
from the CHRISTIAN CENTURY.

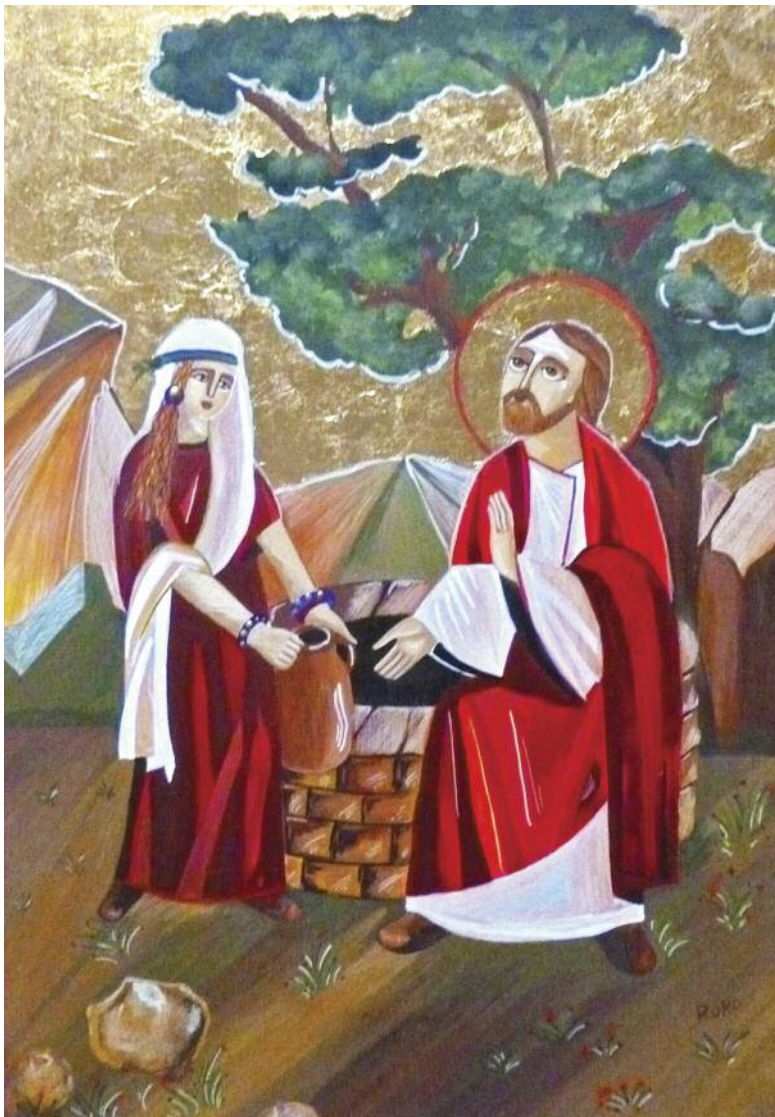
Join us as we venture into the desert and go in
search of a God who seeks us in return.

christiancentury.org/InSearchOf

Listen on
 Google Podcasts

Listen on
 Spotify

Listen on
 Apple Podcasts



USED BY PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST

Jesus Said to Her: "Give Me to Drink" by Rania Kuhn

The serene saints of Egyptian Coptic Orthodox art are markedly different in face and form from the austere holy men and women of more familiar Byzantine images. Trained in art in her native Cairo, Rania Kuhn makes contemporary icons in the Coptic style in France, mindful of the artistic traditions of her ancient Middle Eastern faith community. The Coptic artist's figures have large eyes, open to find faith, small mouths to hold in hurtful words, small ears to hear no evil, and faces suffused with joy.

In this simply rendered icon of Christ's meeting with the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John, braided hair and bracelets mark the pitcher-bearer at the well as the loose-living village outcast. Background details emphasize the central theme of quenching spiritual thirst. The lush greenery in the arid landscape suggests the tree planted by rivers of water, whose leaves never wither (Psalm 1:3). The lavish gold leaf represents the eternal life Christ promises the Samaritan woman.

The icon is one of several Kuhn has made to draw attention to the neglected women saints of Egypt and Europe. "Christ asked the Samaritan woman in a humble way to give him a drink, knowing she was disrespected and humiliated by everyone," says Kuhn. "He gave her living water and a new life. She became St. Photini, a great preacher of the gospel."

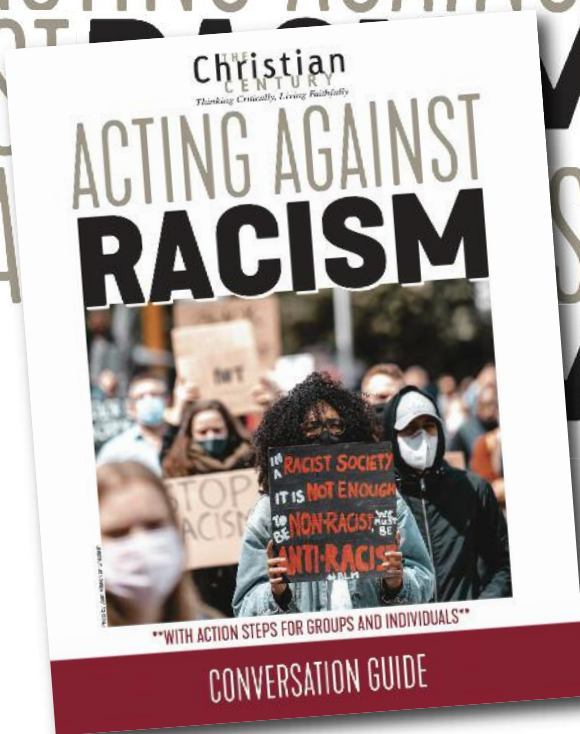
Art selection and commentary by John Kohan, a writer and art collector (sacredartpilgrim.com).

ACTING AGAINST RACISM

It can be difficult to know where to begin a conversation about racism and to identify specific action steps to address it.

Let this downloadable guide help you begin or continue this critical conversation.

This 14-page guide offers articles from the CENTURY's archives, study questions, and specific actions to pursue. It's yours free when you sign up for the CHRISTIAN CENTURY's **free** weekly email newsletter.



A **FREE** CONVERSATION GUIDE FROM THE *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*

Go to:
christiancentury.org/antiracism-guide