

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 129

Recovery from **Modern Amnesia**

Ancient practices
for a faith-full
future

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REST IN PEACE *Far left:* Why is Methodist theologian Tom Oden's tombstone important? See p. 14.

DEEP THOUGHT *Left:* How did Pius X (pictured here working in the Vatican gardens) try to deal with the modern age? See p. 28.

unlearned rise and take heaven by force, and here we are with all our learning—see how we wallow in flesh and blood? Are we ashamed to follow because others have gone before?"

He stormed into another part of the garden, where he famously heard a voice chanting "Take and read" and picked up his copy of Paul's epistles and opened it to Romans 13. Stricken, he gave his life to Christ. That's the part of the story we remember—but it was prompted by a chain of testimony reaching all the way back to the first century.

TEPID MONKS

Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–547) in his *Rule* prescribed readings from the church fathers as well as the Bible to help form his monks in the faith. He noted that early Christians prayed through "in a single day what I pray we tepid monks may get through in a whole week."

HOLY DOCTORS

Frequently those seeking renewal of medieval Catholicism argued they were returning to ancient teachings. John Wycliffe (1330–1384) appealed to Augustine when arguing against transubstantiation:

Nobody on earth is able to see Christ in the consecrated Host with the bodily eye, but by faith. . . . This same opinion is confirmed by blessed Augustine's statement. . . . "What is seen is the bread and the cup . . . but what faith demands is that the bread is the body of Christ and the cup is his blood."

In his defense of his refusal to recant at the Council of Constance, Jan Hus (c. 1369–1415) also name-checked Augustine:

I, Jan Hus, in hope a servant of Jesus Christ, am not willing to declare that every article drawn from my books is erroneous, lest I condemn the opinions of holy doctors, particularly of the blessed Augustine.

YEAR OF CRISIS What does the trauma of the year 1968 in US history have to do with a theological turn toward the past? See p. 12.

Did you know?

MODERN THINKERS WHO HAVE TURNED TO THE EARLY CHURCH WEREN'T THE FIRST TO DO SO

THE REST OF AUGUSTINE'S STORY

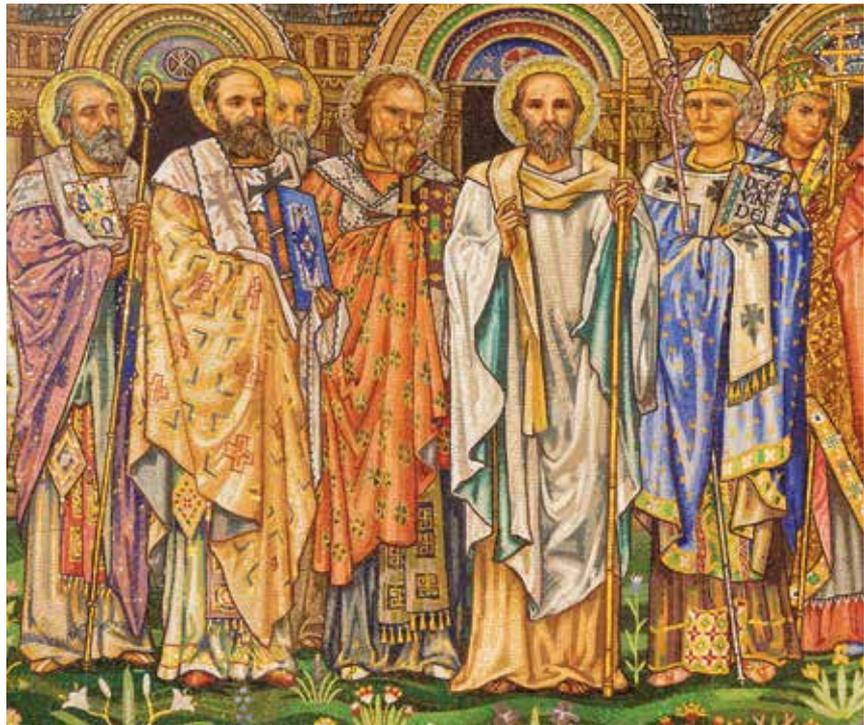
Many of us think we know all about the famous "garden conversion" of Augustine of Hippo (354–430). But do we? On that day an African officer named Pontician visited Augustine's villa and began idly to flip through a copy of Paul's epistles. It prompted him to praise the monastic life pioneered by Antony the Great (251–356)—which Antony had explicitly initiated to capture the spirit of the martyrs. Pontician told Augustine that two of his fellow soldiers had decided to join a monastery after reading Athanasius's *Life of Antony*, and so had their fiancées.

After Pontician left Augustine turned to his friend Alypius and said, "What is the matter with us? The



ODEN TOMBSTONE—JANET LAMOTTE / FIND A GRAVE; PIUS X—AP/WIDEWORLD; CHICAGO DNC—SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE

GOLDEN OLDIES Why did a new desire to imitate church fathers and mothers (pictured here at an Anglican church in Rome) arise in the 20th c.? See p. 9.



WE TEACH NOTHING NEW

The popular image of Luther pictures him as breaking with everything. Yet while he denied that the church fathers were error-free, he firmly believed his movement was restoring the ancient truth of the gospel:

We teach nothing new. We teach what is old and what the apostles and all godly teachers have taught, inculcated, and established before us.

When Lutherans compiled the *Book of Concord* in 1580 to state true Lutheran doctrine, they began with the three most famous ancient creeds: the Apostles' Creed (sixth century), the Nicene Creed (fourth century), and the Athanasian Creed (sixth century). In addition the *Book of Concord* cites over 20 church fathers from the second through the eighth centuries.

WRITERS OF A PURER AGE

In the *Institutes* John Calvin claimed the church fathers were not purely Roman Catholic property:

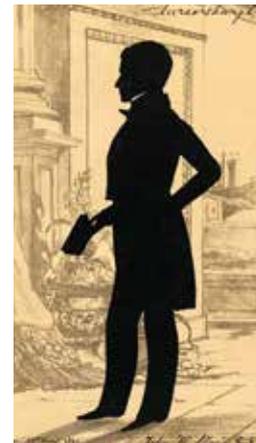
It is a [slander] to represent us as opposed to the Fathers (I mean the ancient writers of a purer age), as if the Fathers were supporters of their impiety.

He acknowledged errors in the fathers, but also used them to argue against clerical celibacy, fasting, and even scholastic theology itself:

All the fathers with one heart have abhorred and with one voice have detested the fact that God's Holy Word has been contaminated by the subtleties of sophists and involved in the squabbles of dialecticians.... Why, if the fathers were now brought back to life, and heard such brawling art as these persons call speculative theology, there is nothing they would less suppose than that these folk were disputing about God!



A LONG SHADOW Right: Who was John Williamson Nevin (pictured here in silhouette), and how did he foreshadow modern debates? See p. 37.



"THAT OLD-TIME RELIGION"

John Wesley wanted Methodism to recover primitive church practices and fervor to renew Anglicanism. His tombstone states his desire to "Revive, Enforce and Defend The Pure Apostolical Doctrines and Practices of the Primitive Church." In one of his sermons,

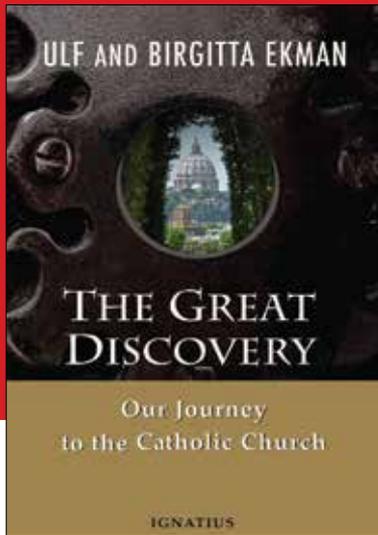
he called Methodism "the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive Church, the religion of the Church of England" and enlisted Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, John Chrysostom, Basil, Ephrem of Syria, and Macarius as his supporters in renewal. ☒

Our first entry is adapted from Chris Armstrong's Patron Saints for Postmoderns (2009).

ELDER STATESMAN How did J. I. Packer advance 20th-c. ecumenism? See p. 32.

MOSAIC CHURCH FATHERS—PAOLO ROMITI / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO
 NEVIN SILHOUETTE—NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY
 J. I. PARKER—REGENT COLLEGE

DISCOVERING MARY, THE CHURCH, & THE PAPACY



◆ THE GREAT DISCOVERY Our Journey to the Catholic Church

Ulf and Birgitta Ekman

The Ekmans were founders of a large Pentecostal church that was the first “mega-church” in Sweden, and Ulf was the country’s most prominent Christian leader. With such prominence they were no strangers to controversy, but news of their leaving Word of Life Church to become Catholics was a bombshell in Sweden. This inspiring testimony tells why they made that difficult journey.

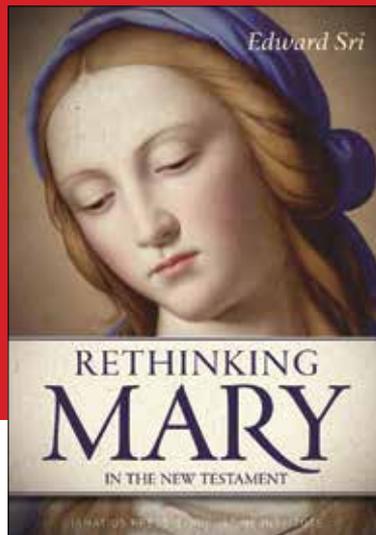
GRDP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$17.95

“Ulf and Birgitta Ekman spent decades as evangelists. Ulf was known as ‘Sweden’s Billy Graham’. This book is their amazing story. You don’t have to be Catholic to love it. If you’re human, it will move you.”

— **Dr. Scott Hahn**,
Author, *Rome Sweet Home*

“Reading this book is akin to listening to husband and wife at a kitchen table, who are truly humbling and charming company. Their resolve to convert to Catholicism is a staggering testimony to quiet courage in Christ.”

— **Sally Read**, Author, *Night’s Bright Darkness: A Modern Conversion Story*



◆ RETHINKING MARY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Edward Sri

Scholars often question how much the New Testament can tell us about the Mother of Jesus. In this comprehensive work, Dr. Sri shows how the Bible reveals much more about Mary than is commonly appreciated. He examines every New Testament reference to Mary, offering a fresh, in-depth look at her that helps us know Mary better and her role in God’s plan.

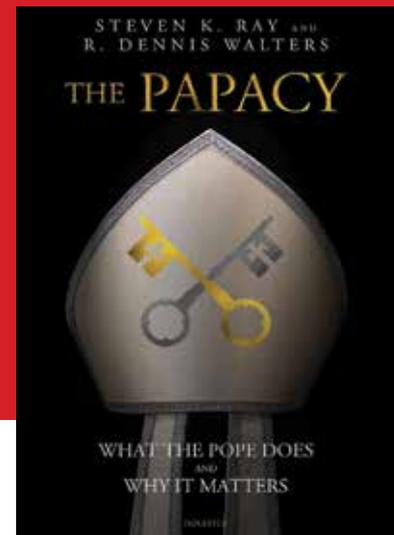
RDMP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$17.95

“An up-to-date, thoroughly exegetical analysis of every key New Testament passage on Mary. A major achievement, and must-read for anyone interested in what the Bible really teaches about the Mother of Jesus.”

—**Dr. Brant Pitre**
Co-author, *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible: The Old Testament*

“This could only be authored by someone with a mastery of contemporary biblical scholarship who is also a lifelong scholar of Mariology – like Edward Sri. Easy to read, serious, and scholarly, here we meet the Mary whom the evangelists aimed to reveal to us.”

—**Dr. Matthew Levering**, Chair of Theology,
Mundelein Seminary



◆ THE PAPACY What the Pope Does and Why It Matters

Steve Ray and Dennis Walters

This book explains that without the Pope’s divinely guided leadership, the Church would suffer the contradictions and divisions that many Christian groups know firsthand. The teaching passed down from the apostles would be subject to arbitrary, numerous interpretations. In describing the Pope’s important role as leader, it also addresses common misconceptions and objections to the papacy.

PPCP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$15.95

“An easy-to-digest, clear introduction to all things papal. From Peter to Francis, and from Matthew’s Gospel to Revelation, it shows why the papacy has an indispensable role in salvation history.”

—**Karl Keating** Founder, Catholic Answers;
Author, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*

“The authors deftly untangle knotty misconceptions and make the case that Christianity will thrive in the present age only if we recover the unity that Christ intended the Petrine ministry to protect and cultivate.”

—**Al Kresta**, Catholic Radio Host, *Kresta in the Afternoon*



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Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*

SEEKING CHRIST

Let me begin by telling you how much I appreciate your fine magazine. I am presently reading issue 127. I have a question, which I hope will not be interpreted as argumentative. My understanding of Christianity is that through the sovereign grace of God a man or woman is brought to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus, these graces flowing from the new birth that God brings by his Holy Spirit. That newborn believer in Jesus is from that moment fully and eternally in union with Christ. Out of that union then grows a life of faith and obedience. If I understand the mystic experiences of the Middle Ages correctly, their outlook seems to be the very reverse. . . . They launch themselves upon a quest for faith and obedience (a life of holiness) so that they can gain union with Christ.

Here is my question: Does not all this simply reflect the pre-Reformation Roman thinking that man makes his way to God in contrast to the Reformation, and I think biblical view, that God in Christ made His way to man rescuing him from sin, death, and condemnation? It seems to me that both views cannot be Christian as each denies the other. Can you clarify this for me?—*Boyd L. Personett, Spring Mount, PA*

Thanks for reading and for writing. First of all, as a magazine we are committed—as our mission and faith statement says—to “seek to present the history of the global church and see the best in each Christian tradition.” We were also intrigued by the fact that Protestant thinkers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, John Newton, and C. S. Lewis all found the mystics valuable, even long after the Reformation.

Second, there is ample evidence that those mystics we covered at length in the issue were seeking a deeper connection to the God they already knew by faith and would ultimately have attributed their spiritual growth in obedience to the sovereign grace of Christ.

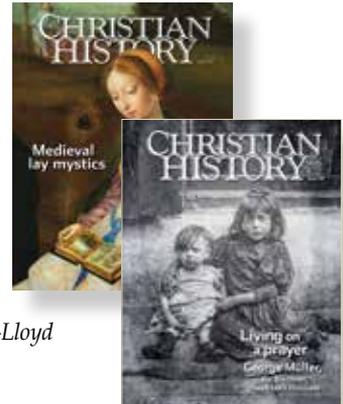
Finally, there wasn't one single pre-Reformation school of thought; like many movements in church history, the mystics fall on a spectrum. So each one of them emphasized how faith worked out in practice differently—from the radical focus on Christ in Julian of Norwich to Meister Eckhart's ideas of detachment from the world, which the church found to be a problem even in his own day.

For more on this, we urge you to read our forum, “A church of the future?” on pp. 46–49 of this issue.

COMPLETE SETS

I think I have every issue you've printed over the years. Thank you for your excellent magazine.—*Gregory Wahlberg, Dover, PA*

Thanks for the magazine—much appreciated. I have all of them since the first one.—*Lloyd Kenyon, Dingmans Ferry, PA*



STRENGTHENING OUR FAITH

Once again, CHI has prepared and delivered a superb issue (#128) on the life of George Müller. As always, this issue is informative and inspirational. I have largely known of Müller anecdotally. This goes far beyond that and demonstrates a true saint of God willing to “live on the edge,” armed with the promises of God, a fruitful prayer life and faith that challenges an otherwise anemic version of faith too often on display in many 21st century churches and denominations.

It personally challenged me and my own weak faith and offers a rather simple yet profound solution: spend quality time in prayer and in the study of His Word. [Placing] this biographical sketch within the context of the Brethren tradition and the rise of Dispensationalism was a brilliant decision of your editors. But then, that has always been one of your strengths. . . .

I hope that my small donations enable you to continue in your tradition of producing quality, Christian writing for this and future generations. Keep up the good work!—*Tom Edmunds, Washington, NJ*

Thanks, Tom! We were challenged by Müller too.

DO YOU CROSS THE SEAS?

We often get asked if we can send Christian History overseas. Christian History is a donation-based publication, and CHI is a registered 501c3 organization. Many in the United States and Canada actually receive the magazine for free if they are unable to make a donation. But due to the high cost of shipping overseas, we require a minimum \$35 donation for all international subscriptions. Of course all of our issues are free to read online anywhere in the world with Internet access, with issues 100 and up—as well as a few selected classic issues—available in full color.



Editor's note

THIS TIME, as they say, it's personal.

I am a recovering victim of "modern amnesia." Maybe you are too? This issue tells the story of Christian thinkers in the last half of the twentieth century who asked questions about faith and found the answers of the modern world unsatisfactory. When they consulted their own denominations for answers, those groups seemed to have forgotten something as well. These thinkers saw mainline Protestants and some Catholics straying from a commitment to the supernatural origins of Christianity and the inspired truths of the Bible, and they saw evangelicals ignoring devotional practices that had nurtured Christians for centuries.

In response these thinkers turned to the early Christian church fathers and mothers and their doctrinal commitments, devotional practices, and ways of worship. In so doing they found their lives transformed. With a gathering intensity, they began to speak, publish, meet, and found organizations devoted to spreading the good news to the rest of us.

ALONG FOR THE RIDE

In this case I was along for the ride. I grew up in an evangelical United Methodist home (I once described my family as "conservative, but not the kind of conservatives that leave") and went to seminary in the early 1990s. While there I discovered the writings of many people you'll read about in this issue, especially Tom Oden, Bob Webber, Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, Kathleen Norris, Thomas Howard, and William Abraham. (The title of this issue echoes Abraham's 1995 book *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia*, a critique of liberal United Methodist theology.)

At seminary I learned of the riches of early church theology and devotion, and found my spiritual life strengthened by fasting, disciplined Scripture study, and frequent Holy Communion. Eventually

I became Anglican. Webber describes people somewhat like me in his most famous book, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*—the "Canterbury trail" being a metaphor for a spiritual journey into Anglicanism. Of course many who were influenced by these thinkers remained in their original churches and worked to recover the riches of the early church there as well.

ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND

This issue is an attempt to understand a movement that, over the last few decades, has sought to combine the best aspects of evangelical and sacramental Christianity, grounded in the Bible and guided by the first few Christian centuries. We begin the issue with four writers and thinkers who speak mostly to Protestant evangelicals—Oden, Webber, Willard, and Foster—and then we move outward to trace a turn back to the ancient sources of our faith among Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and mainline Protestant figures. We also deal with the difficult question of whether renewal can sometimes revive things better left behind.

We hope this issue introduces you to many recent thinkers who have recovered the ancient Christian faith in all its glory. But we also remember what C. S. Lewis once said in his preface to an edition of Athanasius's *On the Incarnation*:

Naturally, since I myself am a writer, I do not wish the ordinary reader to read no modern books. But if he must read only the new or only the old, I would advise him to read the old.

We hope the issue inspires you to discover the riches of the early church mothers and fathers for yourself, with these authors as your companions on the way. ☒



Jennifer Woodruff Tait
Managing editor

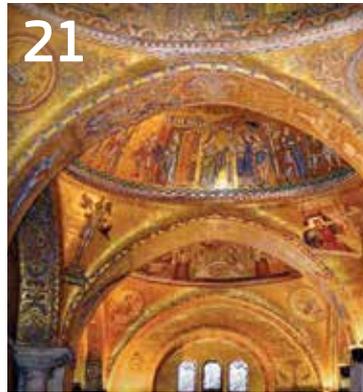
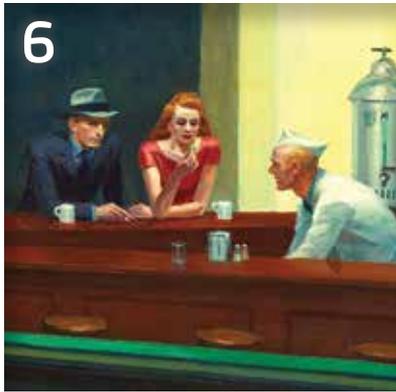
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Don't miss our next issue, which will explore the history and variety of Latin American Christianity.

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Acid rain and Christian truth

WHY DO WE NEED TO RECOVER FROM MODERNITY?

Jonathan A. Powers

WHAT COMES TO MIND when you hear the word “modern”? Probably something that is happening right now. Maybe you think of modern technology—smartphones or electric cars or robots. Actually things that are modern can be, paradoxically, much older than smartphones.

Scholars use “modern” as a label for the dramatic shift in Western society that occurred over the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Radical changes transpired during this three-century span that affected all aspects of Western life, with implications lasting into the twentieth century in areas like art, architecture, theology, and literature.

Scientific discovery and technological innovation exploded during the modern era. This led to a growth in industry, which heightened the standard of living and raised working-class incomes, causing a strengthened middle class to emerge. New political systems such as democracy appeared, giving common people legal rights once reserved for

POUR ME ANOTHER In his famous 1942 painting, *Nighthawks*, Edward Hopper captured the loneliness many people felt as a result of modern individualism.

the aristocracy. Health standards increased, and life expectancy grew. Humans marveled at their own accomplishments, and enthusiasm spread for future possibilities. Still many saw flaws in this progress.

THE RISE OF RATIONALISM

“Insufficient facts always invite danger, Captain.”
—Lieutenant Spock on *Star Trek*

Premodern people assumed the Aristotelian principle that each of us is born with a clean slate and that all intellectual knowledge is acquired through an individual’s sensory experiences. In its Christian form, this principle taught that our interpretation of the world requires reliance upon revelation and tradition, accompanied by God-given reason illumined by the Holy Spirit. Faith must precede reason.

A motto coined by St. Augustine of Hippo and later credited to St. Anselm of Canterbury sums up the idea: "I believe in order to understand." C. S. Lewis said something similar in his essay "Is Theology Poetry?":

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it, I see everything else.

Central to modernity was the rise of a new rationalism in philosophy and science, focused solely on what the human mind could understand through reason alone. This owed much to the spread of "Cartesian epistemology," a thought system developed by philosopher and scientist René Descartes (1596–1650).

Descartes represented a major break with the past. He declared that feelings, sense perceptions, and tradition are deficient sources of facts. In Descartes's assessment knowledge is attained solely by reason. The senses can be deceptive, he believed, and revelation and tradition are not dependable. Reason alone determines knowledge; everything else is either bias, opinion, or superstition.

While not all modern philosophers agreed with Descartes, his influence on the modern worldview was pervasive. He paved the way for thinkers to presume society could reform through the use of objective reasoning and logic, and for them to challenge ideas that previous generations had grounded in tradition and faith. Instead they sought to advance knowledge through rationality and the scientific method.

As a result modernist thinkers believed they possessed new knowledge that allowed them a privileged position to judge the errors of the past and advance into an improved, more excellent future. They favored the natural world in place of the supernatural, progress in place of tradition, and the secular in place of the sacred.

THE ACIDS OF MODERNITY

Undeniably this trend radically affected the Christian faith. The "acids of modernity" (as political commentator Walter Lippmann called them) ate away at traditional Christian convictions and rituals. In his book *Religion and the Enlightenment*, James Byrne named three significant ways modernity was at odds with traditional Christian orthodoxy.

First the emphasis on the power of reason to discover the truth about humanity and the world posed a threat to traditional Christian belief. The modern ideal was a Lieutenant Spock-like figure, able to follow logic and



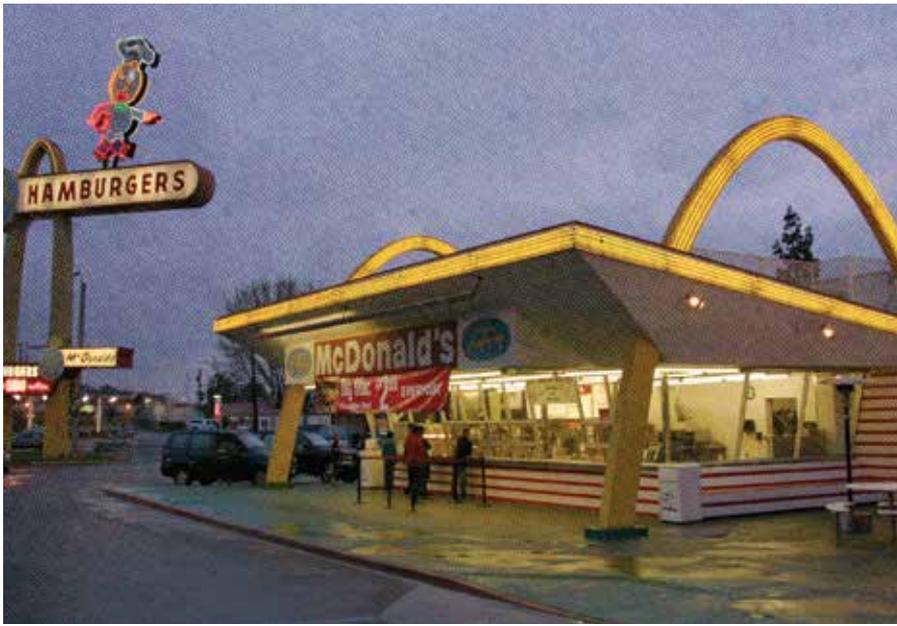
WHAT WILL THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE? By the mid-20th c., modernism's influence was clearly seen in architecture and design. A 1950s ad (top) imagines a "space age" kitchen, while another (bottom) presents one of the most iconic cars of the 20th c., the "57 Chevy."

reason wherever it led without any influence of personal bias. The peril for the church of such exclusive focus on rationality and logic was the rejection of all authoritative claims of revelation, faith, and tradition.

Modernity called into question the credibility of biblical witness, historic testimony, and religious authority: if something about the Christian faith doesn't make rational sense, then it can't be true. Many modern thinkers applied and continue to apply this even to such crucial elements of faith as Christ's divinity and his Resurrection.

The second challenge modernism posed to Christian orthodoxy was skepticism toward institutions of the past. As a general rule, modernity encouraged suspicion of any traditional truth claim regardless of the source of the claim: tradition must be scrutinized and sometimes rejected in favor of more rational approaches to knowledge.

The temptation for the church was to no longer rely on traditional doctrines as authoritative. Ultimately



BIG MAC, PLEASE *Left:* Fast food challenged old rhythms of feasting and fasting. This is the oldest McDonald's still open, built in 1953 in Downey, California.

MUSIC IN YOUR POCKET *Below:* Radio, TV, and eventually the internet have brought the world closer but also fractured local community.



this led to a fractured and individualistic approach to faith. If the church throws out tradition, then each person is free to define truth for himself or herself.

The third characteristic of modernity potentially corrosive to the church was the emergence of a scientific way of thinking that many feel gives a viable alternative to religion in understanding how the world works. Naturalism

asserts that natural laws rather than spiritual laws rule and govern the universe: because humans can prove how the world works through the use of science, there is no longer need for a reigning and ruling God.

While the church did not fully buy into the dismissal of everything divine, it did begin to question certain supernatural elements of Christian faith: the miraculous and the sacramental. The old perception of the natural world as “charged with the grandeur of God” yielded inch by inch to the dominant claims of scientific reason. Rearguard actions continued—such as the nineteenth-century romantic movement of Gerard Manley Hopkins (author of “God’s Grandeur”) and the twentieth-century literary revival by Chesterton, Lewis, and Tolkien. But ultimately for many Christians, naturalism resulted in a disenchantment with the world. Science, it seemed, could now answer the big questions without God.

NEW WAYS? OLD WAYS?

In light of the challenges posed by these “acids of modernity,” Christian thinkers felt they had to find

between science and the Bible, reason and the Bible, and historical evidence and the Bible. Therefore to discover the true core of Christian faith, they deemed it necessary to “demythologize” Christianity—denying any supernatural elements such as miracles or the Resurrection of Jesus. Many liberal theologians ultimately explained growth in virtue as the sole purpose of the Christian faith, with Jesus Christ as a role model.

A second reaction to modernity came from a part of the church unwilling to let go of the foundational, creedal, and biblical beliefs of Christianity. This group of conservative theologians applied what was called “evidential apologetics,” a proof-oriented defense that rationalized the faith.

They sought to convince people of the truth of Christian belief by building structures of certainty for faith-based claims: critical defenses of biblical texts, defenses of the doctrine of inerrancy, discoveries in archaeology, and other analytical proofs of Christianity. Some also elevated personal experience above everything else as decisive evidence of the sure presence and work of God.

In their effort to fight against modernity, however, they often employed the same purely rational approach to Christian faith. Ultimately neither approach knew what to do with many ancient doctrines, liturgies, and practices of the church.

LOOKING BACKWARD

All reform begins with looking forward in dissatisfaction. Something is amiss and needs to be righted. But reform also begins by looking backward—or at least the church has functioned this way over its long history. Christians throughout the ages—from Augustine

CHOPSTICKS OR BURGERS? *Right:* Many modern trends have spread worldwide through mass media; this Shanghai cafe has deliberately adopted a 1950s US diner look.

ART MART *Below:* The Bauhaus art and design school in Germany (active 1919–1933) emphasized many themes that characterized the modern age—rationality, lack of traditional ornamentation, and mass production.



to Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley—have viewed the past as a trustworthy guide (see “Did you know,” inside front cover). The past can show us where things have gone astray and how they can be corrected.

In the twentieth century, many Christian thinkers began to look forward by looking back. We’ll meet many of them on the following pages, but we’ll begin by considering two of their journeys as paradigms for helping us understand this return to orthodoxy—especially its impact on evangelicalism.

United Methodist theologian Tom Oden (1931–2016) was highly influenced by modernity early in his career. For Oden the study of ancient Christianity ultimately led him out of the disillusionments of modernity and toward the recovery of Christian orthodoxy (see “He made no new contribution to theology,” pp. 10–14). In his autobiography, *A Change of Heart* (2014), Oden wrote,

Before my reversal, all of my questions about theology and the modern world had been premised on key value assumptions of modern [liberal] consciousness—assumptions such as absolute moral relativism.

After meeting new friends in the writings of antiquity, I had a new grounding for those questions. . . . I have come to trust the very consensus I once dismissed and distrusted. Generations of double-checking confirm it as a reliable body of scriptural interpretation. I now relish studying the diverse rainbow of orthodox voices from varied cultures spanning all continents over two thousand years.

Baptist-turned-Anglican professor Robert Webber (1933–2007), meanwhile, was dissatisfied with evangelicalism’s overly rational, cognitive, and sermon-centric approach to worship (see “The road to the future runs through the past,” pp. 16–19). He felt that this resulted in a pastor-dominated, human-centered, ethereal, non-participatory gathering.

The pathway to reform, as Webber wrote in *Common Roots* (1978), is “to face the negative task of



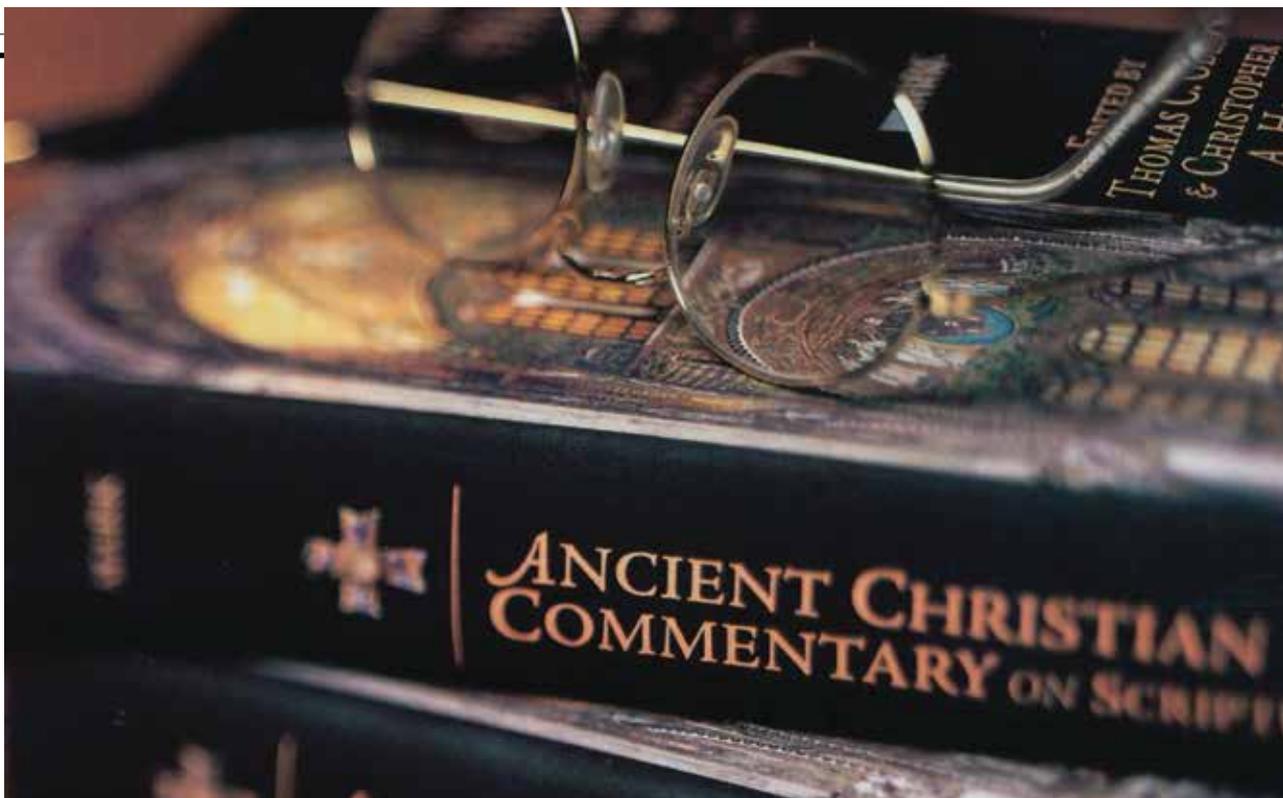
overcoming . . . modernity, while on the other hand . . . [to] grow into a more mature and historic expression of the faith.” In his own study of the first five centuries of the church, Webber discovered the fully orthodox Christianity he had longed for.

TESTED TRUTH

All the thinkers you’ll meet in this issue believed that the ancient faith of the church has regenerative power for the church today and that the long memory of tested Christian truth tends to eventually override the shorter memory of error.

They stepped back behind Descartes and the flaws they saw in rationalism to learn from teachers such as Irenaeus, Augustine, and John Chrysostom. As they did so, they learned how to rightly guard, reasonably vindicate, and wisely advocate the faith once delivered to all the saints—so that the church would not concede to the spirit of the times but rather respond to the times, overcoming any doubt or error that may threaten it. ■

Jonathan A. Powers is assistant professor of worship at Asbury Theological Seminary and the author or editor of several resources that draw on church tradition for modern use.



“He made no new contribution to theology”

TOM ODEN'S INFLUENTIAL RETURN TO ORTHODOX FAITH

Christopher A. Hall

THEOLOGIAN TIMOTHY GEORGE remarked in his eulogy for Thomas Clark Oden (1931–2016):

Few theologians of the past 100 years can claim to have had tea and cookies with Rudolf Bultmann, discussed theology with Karl Barth at his hospital bed in Basel, had lunch with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, had an audience with Pope John Paul II, driven through Galilee in a Fiat with Avery Dulles in the passenger seat, and conferred with Coptic and Pentecostal theologians in Africa.

From tea with Bultmann to time with the pope, Oden's surprising influences paralleled his own massive paradigm shift. Turning from being the most liberal of liberal theologians to becoming a chief mover in a rediscovery of early church riches, Oden's about-face revealed a life full of surprises indeed.

THE COUNTRY FIDDLER'S GRANDSON

Tom Oden (as everyone called him) came from a home rooted in both the pietistic tradition and the political ideals of the Democratic Party. His parents

GOING BACK . . . WAY BACK Among the many works Oden wrote and edited, the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* may be his most famous.

were devoted to the Bible, music, and books—and deeply committed as well to liberal political philosophy and the union movement.

Oden's grandfather was, he once said, “an Arkansas country fiddler.” He related that his grandfather's love for music passed on to his dad, who always desired a house full of melody. Oden grew up in a home “pulsating with music of all kinds—classic, country, hymns, and popular songs.” He later believed his love for music helped him to think clearly and well about God:

It was through music that I first learned to reason. The reasoning process occurs through rhythm, melody, chords, progressions, transitions, and grace notes. From a young age I grasped intuitively that I could apply musical modes of mental organization to anything else I studied.

While music moved Oden to reason, books enthralled him with learning. A natural-born reader, Oden would steal into his father's law office and surreptitiously read thick law books—when he was just 10. He mined for wisdom as he sifted through the lines of the many old tomes:

Dad purchased a set of small leather-bound books containing the shortened versions of classics such as [Shakespeare's] *Hamlet*, [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau and the ballads of Robert Burns. One of them was Emerson's *Self-Reliance*. I read it at an early age, maybe 10. Because of Emerson's book, self-reliance became a key aspiration in my search for character.

In his undergraduate days at the University of Oklahoma, his love of the written word continued to shape him: "I spent hours at Rickner's Book Store, looking for whatever new or used books I could afford," he wrote; "I devoted endless hours to wandering freely around the open stacks of the great Bizzell Library, the largest research library in the state." The library became an enchanted, "magical" learning space for Oden: "I was a happy bookworm feasting through long rows of shelves."

TESTED BY ATHEISM

However not all books would nourish life in the young man trying to make sense of human history; some would starve it. He found this out the hard way. In his early efforts to flesh out his beliefs, he "was particularly drawn to the agnostics and atheists, partly to let them test my belief system, which they did." Immersing his mind in the thoughts of three key writers—Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx—Oden absorbed from them ideas he later would have to unlearn.

He found Nietzsche "to be the most poetic and rhetorically powerful of all the philosophers" for many years—until he later discovered the work of Søren Kierkegaard. Sigmund Freud "forced me to question everything I had learned beforehand about psychological dynamics, abnormality, dreams and sexuality."

Yet it was Karl Marx who most "stormed" into Oden's "imagination, especially on the labor theory of value, the class struggle, and economic determination in history." It would take 10 years for Oden to discern the faults in his hero:

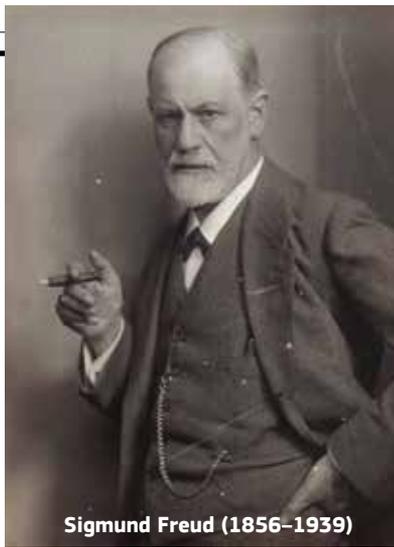
As I looked back, [Marx] was full of flawed arguments, but they were central to my thoughts in the 50s. I let their words saturate my mind before I

went to seminary, and they remained in my mind like a ghost well beyond my years at Yale.

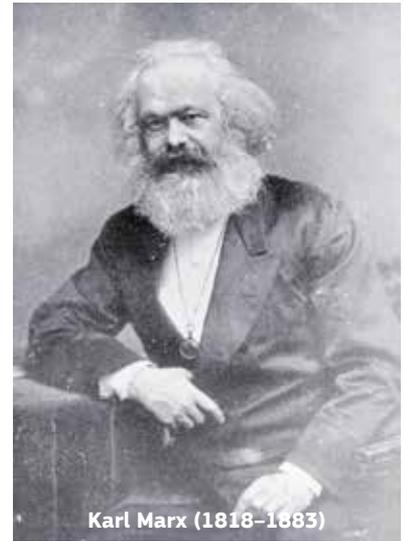
In 1952 while he was at Oklahoma University, Oden met and married Edrita Pokorny; they would remain married until her death in 1998. Oden decided to attend seminary at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. He felt called to Christian ministry, "but not to a ministry of evangelization or soul care." He would eventually be ordained in the Methodist Church.

He later recalled, "Whenever I read the New Testament after 1950, I was trying to read it entirely without its crucial premises of incarnation and resurrection." He admitted that this approach

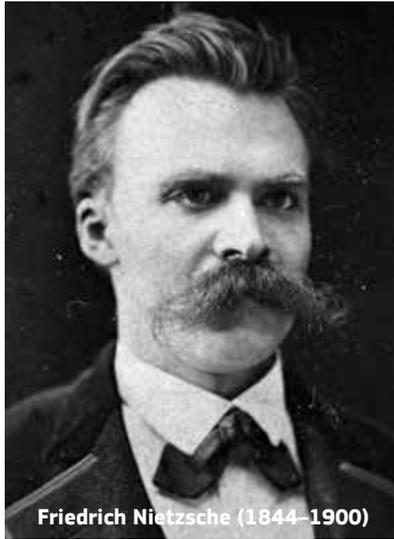
required a lot of circular reasoning for me to establish what the text said. I habitually assumed that truth in religion was reducible to economics (with Marx) or psychosexual motives (with Freud) or self-assertive power (with Nietzsche). It was truly a self-deceptive time for me, but I had



Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)



Karl Marx (1818–1883)



Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)



Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976)



no inkling of its insidious dangers.

Sadly, he later said, “The saving grace of God on the cross was not in my mix of life-changing ideas.”

During Oden’s time at Perkins, he was exposed to a heavy helping of existentialist thought, which argued that humans define their own meaning. Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, and Rudolf Bultmann became close intellectual companions.

Bultmann (1884–1976) especially symbolized the direction of Oden’s thought in the early 1950s. The German thinker was best known for “demythologizing” the Bible—arguing that Jesus had to be stripped of the “mythical world picture” of the first century, including any belief in miracles or the supernatural, to make him relevant to the modern world.

After Oden left Perkins for graduate study at Yale, his PhD dissertation, granted in 1960, considered the theologies of Bultmann and Karl Barth

(1886–1968); he eventually met both theologians. He continued to defend Bultmann in his academic writings until the mid-60s.

Oden later remembered this period as one of theological experimentation combined with a mistrust and disdain for the past. His interaction with Scripture and other theological texts was less a dialogue than a “filtering process”; he allowed more traditional sources to speak to him “only insofar as they could meet” his “conditions,” his “worldview,” and his “assumptions as a modern man.”

The turning point came as Oden watched the tumultuous events of the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Serious disputes boiled over as security guards roughed up newsman Dan Rather and police clashed with antiwar protestors, sparking four days of violence. Oden recalled:

By that time, I had developed a preliminary revulsion against antinomianism [the rejection of laws] and anarchism, which would soon grow toward moderate political neoconservatism. When people started throwing excrement at the police in Chicago, I got scared, and I’ve never been the same since.

NEW CONVERSATION PARTNERS Oden (pictured below on the cover of his memoir) found new purpose when he engaged with thinkers like Irenaeus (represented on a French stained glass window at left).

Throughout the 1960s Oden had been sincerely committed to liberalized abortion legislation in Oklahoma. He increasingly began to think that his advocacy of abortion rights demonstrated a fundamental misdirection in his own value structure. He wrote later that his support of individual choice as a fundamental value had led to the sacrifice of thousands of individual lives:

In the midst of all the rhetoric about freedom came the embarrassing awareness that I was condoning a moral matrix in which innocent life was being taken. That was a shock. It still is.

Oden’s revulsion over his abortion stance produced a further loss of confidence in a whole series of liberal programs he had previously supported, both political and theological: hedonism, autonomous individualism, the idolatry of the new moral relativism. Oden’s worldview had become a dead end. Where was he to turn? He had always focused on the future for solutions. Soon he would begin to look in the opposite direction.

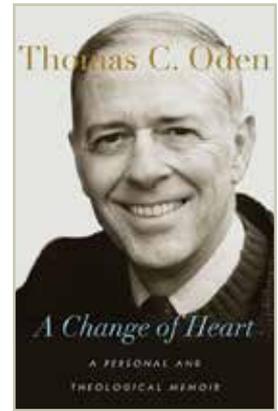
BACK TO THE FATHERS

Oden began teaching at Drew University in the early 1970s. Still heavily influenced by liberal theology and transactional psychology, he published *Game Free: The Meaning of Intimacy* in 1974. But soon Will Herberg (1901–1977), a well-known professor of Judaica and philosophy at Drew, became a key conversation partner of his. Though 30 years Oden’s senior, Herberg soon became his friend as well.

As their friendship grew, Herberg (a devout Jew) spoke to Oden very directly about his path as a theologian and a Christian. Oden writes that over lunch one day, their arguments came to a head:

Will was trying to show me the errors I was making were much deeper than I had realized. I tried to defend myself. Suddenly my irascible, endearing Jewish friend leaned into my face and told me I was densely ignorant of Christianity, and he couldn’t permit me to throw my life away.

Herberg further told Oden, “You will remain theologically uneducated until you study carefully Athanasius, Augustine, and Aquinas.”



ANOTHER CHANGE OF HEART

Communist activist turned conservative Jewish theologian Will Herberg taught at Drew University from 1955 to 1976.

The more Oden read theologians of the past, especially the church fathers, the more he realized that much of what he had taken for “new” was as old as the apostolic tradition itself:

I realized that I must listen intently, actively, without reservation. Listen in such a way that my whole life depended upon hearing. Listen in such a way that I could see telescopically beyond my modern myopia, to break through the walls of my modern prison, and actually hear voices from the past with different assumptions entirely about the world and time and human culture. Only then in my 40s did I begin to become a theologian. Up to that time I had been teaching theology without ever having sufficiently met the patristic mentors who could teach me theology.

READING HIS EPITAPH

One night Oden had a dream that illustrated the dramatic reorientation of his values after that conversation with Herberg. In the dream he saw himself walking



through the New Haven cemetery and reading his own epitaph. It read: “He made no new contribution to theology.” He awoke refreshed and relieved that he no longer had to produce something new as a theologian to fulfill his vocation:

In my dream I was extremely pleased, for I realized I was learning what Irenaeus meant when he told us not to invent new doctrine. . . . The dream somehow said to me . . . that my calling as a theologian could be fulfilled through obedience to apostolic tradition [the doctrines taught by the apostles and the early church].

Oden went on to write works specifically addressed to his United Methodist colleagues, encouraging them to recover the riches of Wesleyan tradition. He wrote five books on Wesley’s theology, edited an edition of Phoebe Palmer’s writings, and attacked mainline theology in *Requiem* (1995).

But most of all, from the 1980s on, Oden largely dedicated the remaining years of his life to significant projects in the field of patristics (the study of the early church). First of all in the 1980s and early 1990s, he released a three-volume systematic theology. It was structured around Trinitarian doctrine and based thoroughly on the works of the church fathers.

Soon he began work on an even bigger project: *The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (ACCS), a 29-volume patristic commentary on

Fulfilling a longing for the early church

A commentary dedicated to allowing ancient Christian exegetes to speak for themselves will refrain from the temptation to fixate endlessly upon contemporary criticism. Rather, it will stand ready to provide textual resources from a distinguished history of exegesis which has remained massively inaccessible and shockingly disregarded during the last century . . . the multicultural, multilingual, transgenerational resources of the early ecumenical Christian tradition. . . .

The preached word in our time has remained largely bereft of previously influential patristic inspiration. Recent scholarship has so focused attention upon post-Enlightenment historical and literary methods that it has left this longing largely unattended and unserved. . . . Intrinsically an ecumenical project, this series is designed to serve Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox lay, pastoral, and scholarly audiences. — *from the “General Introduction” to the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture Taken from Mark (ACCS) ©2005 edited by Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426. www.ivpress.com*



RETURNING TO THE SOURCES By the end of his days, Oden's life had come full circle, recalling his early love of learning at the University of Oklahoma.

of *Renovaré* (see "Everyday reality, eternal hope," pp. 21–24).

Oden's last major project included books on ancient African Christianity, including *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* (2007). He was instrumental in establishing the Center for Early African Christianity (CEAC), an active study center now housed at Yale. Oden's work on the church fathers had revealed to him the importance of African perspectives on the ancient formation of Christian doctrine. He wrote in his memoir:

The Christians living on the African continent south of the Mediterranean had originally taught the Christians of

Europe and the Middle East. Africans had informed and educated the very best of Syriac, Cappadocian, Greek and Latin teachers. . . . Christianity on the African continent had a much longer history than was portrayed by many of its modern colonial expressions.

He would eventually publish three books on African Christianity. In all he ended up writing over 50 books in addition to his work as an editor on the ACCS and its related projects.

At the end of *A Change of Heart*, Oden looked back over his life (he would die only two years after the memoir was published in 2014) and saw God's providence at work:

I have faced problems common to all, yet it still amazes me that after living such a fragmented life for the first forty years, I have come out of it with a clear identity, a sustainable sense of self and unity of purpose grounded in salvation history. Many times I have compared one stage with another, but those changes have seemed to me to be the core events in my spiritual formation. Those unexpected turns are the story.

Oden's tombstone at Rose Hill Burial Park in Oklahoma City does not identify him as having "made no new contribution to theology." But the body of work he has left us does. ■

Christopher A. Hall is president of Renovaré, associate editor of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, and author of four volumes on patristic theology, Scripture reading, worship, and discipleship. Excerpts are taken from A Change of Heart by Thomas C. Oden. ©2014 by Thomas C. Oden. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426. www.ivpress.com

every book of the Bible. Oden linked the ACCS project to initial conversations he had with Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) and later conversations with Howard and Roberta Ahmanson, who helped resource the project. Oden's visit with Ratzinger over four days in New York in 1988 "would remain important to me for the rest of my life. There I began to consider the deliberate study of the history of patristic exegesis as a paramount personal vocation."

THE REAL PATRISTIC DEAL

He told editors at InterVarsity Press—which took a huge risk publishing the ACCS series, one later richly repaid in sales—that he had once paid over \$300 for a Bible commentary series based on the church fathers only to find it was a fraud. Now he proposed to do the job for real. He wrote later,

No one I knew was talking about a comprehensive correlation of every biblical passage with the best thoughts of patristic writers from the first to the eighth century. . . . The worshiping community needed a usable patristic commentary for its spiritual formation and homiletic wisdom. Historians needed better access to the history of exegesis. I needed a usable patristic commentary for my own spiritual formation.

This concern for spiritual formation sprang from what Oden called a conversion in his life and vocation as a theologian and the love he had developed for the church. Oden had written previously on pastoral care, but he increasingly began to view the deeper spiritual formation of Christians as a fundamental priority for his own teaching ministry. This led to his participation as a general editor for *The Life with God Bible*, on which he worked closely with Richard Foster, president

Taking the long view back

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century renewal and cooperation

In our “Did you know?” (inside front cover), we’ve already shared many “back to the fathers” movements. Since the nineteenth century, a number of such groups have devoted themselves specifically to problems raised by the modern world.

The **Stone-Campbell Movement**, also called the “Restorationist” movement, began on the American frontier through the independent ministries of Barton Stone (1772–1844) and Alexander Campbell (1788–1866) and his father, Thomas Campbell (1763–1854). In 1832 the two groups joined together.

Among their distinctive practices were a rejection of all creeds; celebration of the Lord’s Supper weekly; and the practice of adult baptism by immersion as being necessary for salvation. Many congregations also worshiped without instrumental accompaniment because the New Testament does not mention instruments. They frequently said, “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.”

The **Plymouth Brethren** came together around 1830—first in Dublin and then in Oxford before they became centered in Plymouth, England. They arose out of various groups of British evangelicals and Anglicans who wanted to share the Lord’s Supper across denominational lines and to base their life together solely on the Bible.

The **Oxford Movement** or Anglo-Catholic Movement began in 1833 with the publication of the *Tracts for the Times* series by some clergymen in the Church of England who argued that Anglicans should return to more Catholic practices. The most controversial tract, *Tract 90* by John Henry Newman (1801–1890), argued against a Protestant interpretation of the Church of England’s Articles of Religion.

As a result of the movement, Anglicans established religious orders, re-introduced many Roman Catholic liturgical practices, focused more strongly on the Eucharist, and eventually published the landmark hymnal *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1861). Newman’s conversion to Catholicism in 1845 alarmed many, raising the question of whether a return to classic Christian liturgy and devotion necessarily means a journey out of Protestantism—a question that has haunted many later renewers.

The modern **ecumenical movement** urges Christians to cooperate—and even unite after centuries of fracturing—around core creedal commitments to meet modern challenges. Among Protestants it is usually considered to have begun in 1910 with the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. It developed



WHAT SHOULD WE PUT IN OUR CHURCHES? Some reformers revived early church practices. Others rejected anything the Bible did not specifically establish.

further through the World Conference of Life and Work in 1925. One of the first denominations to come together on this basis was the Church of South India in 1947, a union of Anglican, Methodist, and Reformed believers that maintains official global relationships with all of its predecessor groups. In 1948, the World Council of Churches was formed to further the ecumenical aim (ironically, many late twentieth-century reformers would oppose it as a bastion of liberalism).

Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, many Orthodox Christians left Russia for Western Europe and tried to open dialogues with both Catholics and Protestants. They founded the **Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius** in the late 1920s in England to facilitate this; it still exists today.

Finally, the **Inklings** and their colleagues are known for many things—apologetics, fiction, poetry, drama—but it’s worth remembering that part of what drew the group together was a shared opposition to modernity. The group began meeting in Oxford around 1930 and most famously included Owen Barfield, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams.

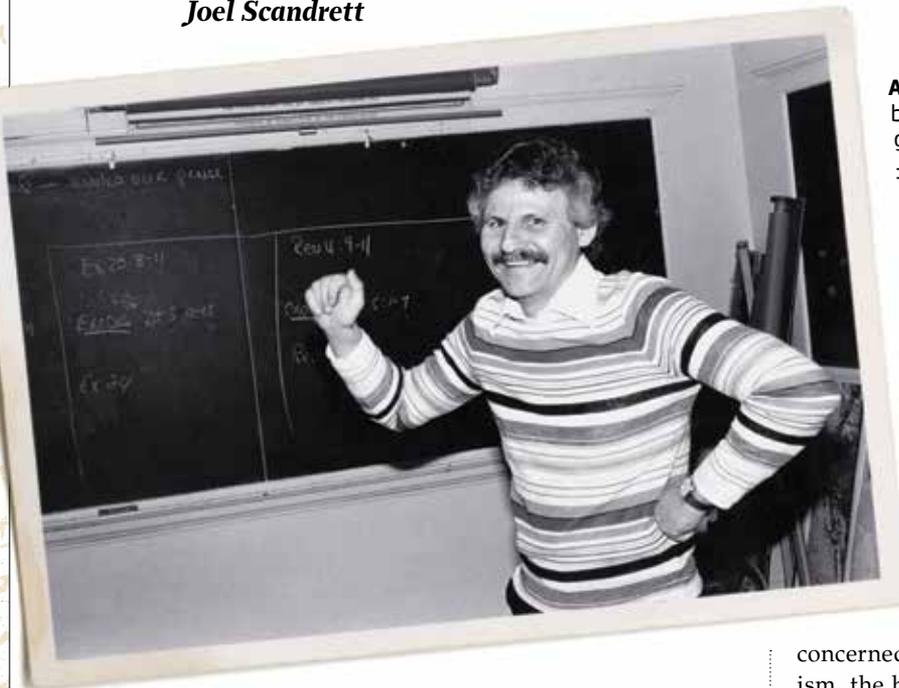
Dorothy L. Sayers was a friend of several members and a theological fellow-traveler. In addition they counted antimodernist journalist, poet, and essayist G. K. Chesterton among their influences. Though the group did not set out to found a movement, their influence through their collective writing arguably surpasses that of almost everyone else we’ve mentioned.

—Jennifer Woodruff Tait

“The road to the future runs through the past”

BOB WEBBER AND THE “ANCIENT FUTURE” OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

Joel Scandrett



AND GLADLY TEACH This snapshot from Webber’s early days at Wheaton captures his energetic spirit.

were sown in the course of his diverse training.

On completion of his ThD at Concordia in 1968, Webber was hired by flagship evangelical school Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, where he served as professor of theology until his retirement in 2000. In retirement he served as a professor of ministry at Northern Seminary in the Chicago suburbs until his death from pancreatic cancer.

Webber’s early theological interests focused on evangelical apologetics and engagement with culture. He was

concerned about the challenge of secular humanism, the belief that humans do not need God to be moral and live a fulfilling life. However he came to a crisis point early in his career that would transform his approach and set him on a new path in his life, thought, and ministry.

In the fall of 1969, Wheaton College invited the young professor of theology to preach a sermon during the chapel service. He determined to speak on an evangelical response to modern secular culture. However as he pondered a response to the existential despair pervading the late 1960s, he realized that his rationalist training could not provide an answer. A despairing culture did not need arguments for God’s existence; it needed an encounter with the living God.

Webber soon became convinced that Christian worship was the primary context for encounter with God, and this led to a twofold discovery. The first was liturgical worship. Frustrated with the “educational” approach of the sermon-oriented worship he had experienced at Wheaton and elsewhere, Webber attended a Roman Catholic Easter Vigil in the spring of 1972. As he participated in that liturgy, he encountered the reality of the Resurrection like never before.

This led in turn to a second discovery: the church fathers. Webber had been introduced to the church

HOW DO YOU deliver an authentic faith into the new cultural situation of the twenty-first century? . . . The way into the future, I argue, is not innovation or a new start for the church. Rather, the road to the future runs through the past.

So wrote Robert Eugene “Bob” Webber in his book *Ancient-Future Evangelism* (2003). And perhaps few evangelical figures have been more closely identified with recent retrieval of the ancient Christian past than Webber. He taught, spoke, and published prodigiously on the recovery of the ancient Christian tradition by present-day evangelicals. Both followers and critics acknowledge him as a catalyst in the awakening of American evangelicals to their ancient Christian heritage.

FROM THE CONGO TO WHEATON

Bob Webber was a “missionary kid,” born in the Congo and raised in Western Pennsylvania. The son of a Baptist minister, he went to Bob Jones University before attending Anglican, Reformed, and Lutheran institutions: Reformed Episcopal Seminary, Covenant Theological Seminary, and Concordia Theological Seminary. Many of the seeds of his turning back to the past



ANCIENT-FUTURE PREACHER Webber's study of the church fathers (some of whom, like Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great, are pictured *above* in this mosaic at St. Sophia's in Kiev) led him to compose some of his most famous works (at *right*).



fathers in graduate school, but he now began earnestly reading them for what they had to say about worship. He found himself drawn to the Christ-centered liturgical practices of the ancient church.

AN ORDERED EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

Webber soon made his way into the Episcopal Church. He found in the liturgical tradition of Anglican worship the same principles he had encountered in the early church. He also discovered that liturgy aided his evangelical commitments. In *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail* (1985), which describes his journey, he wrote,

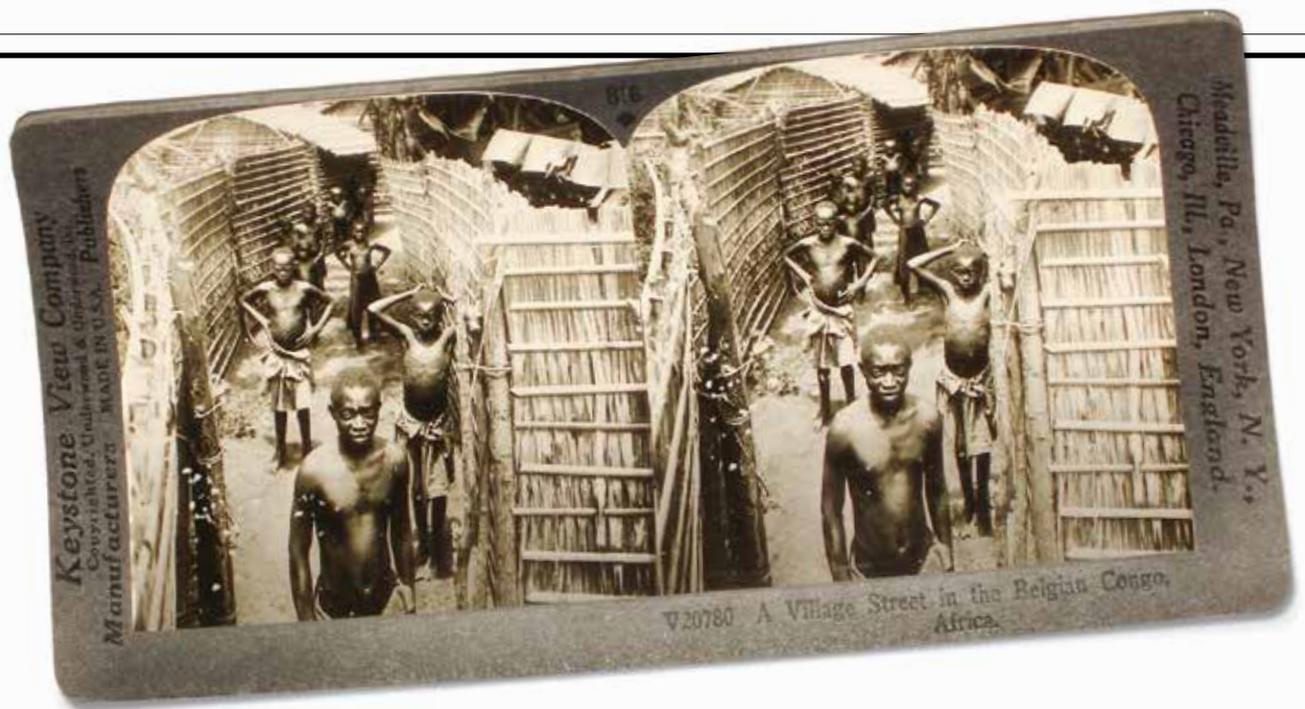
I am drawn to [Anglican worship] because it is so thoroughly evangelical. I have always confessed Christ as the central person of human history and of my life. Yet, until my worship life was oriented around an ordered experience of Christ not only on a weekly, but on a yearly pattern, I was unable to express in a concrete way my personal commitment to Christ.

Continued reading of the church fathers led to further transformation of his theology. In the sacramental practice of ancient Christianity, he discovered a way

to reclaim the tangible means by which God mediates grace; in the spiritual practice of the ancient church, he found a model for more holistic spirituality; and in the ecclesiology of the ancient church, he uncovered an understanding of the church's ecumenical unity. By the mid-1970s Webber had made the turn to what would become his "ancient-future" orientation.

A person of immense vitality, Webber published over 40 books and 175 articles in the course of his 40-year career—in addition to his full-time teaching and frequent speaking engagements. And he was a reformer for the people. He had little interest in writing for his academic peers. Rather he sought to inform and persuade a lay evangelical audience, with the goal of changing minds, hearts, and habits.

Webber was also an organizer. In 1977 he brought together a group of sympathetic theologians—including Donald Bloesch, Peter Gillquist, and Thomas Howard—to issue what they called "The Chicago Call: An Appeal to Evangelicals." Under Webber's direction 45 evangelical leaders drafted this statement at



the National Conference of Evangelicals for Historic Christianity, held in Chicago in May of 1977. The call summoned evangelicals to recover their historic Christian roots and history, embrace creedal identity, practice sacramental integrity and authentic spirituality, and prize the authority and unity of the church.

The “Chicago Call” garnered little response at the time; however it crystallized an agenda that Webber subsequently followed. In 1978 he published a book that signaled this new agenda, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity*. David Neff, then editor of *Christianity Today*, remarked in an introduction to a later edition of the book:

In both the Chicago Call and *Common Roots*, Webber and his friends saw the potential in tradition for the renewal and reorientation of evangelicalism. This was not capital-T Tradition as some fixed authority, but a dynamic history of the Holy Spirit in the Church, leading and guiding it (as Jesus had promised) into all truth (John 16:13).

RETRIEVAL FOR RENEWAL

In this Webber differed from his colleagues Howard and Gillquist. Howard (b. 1935), author of *Evangelical Is Not Enough* (1984) and brother of missionary Elisabeth Howard Elliot, eventually became Roman Catholic; Gillquist (1938–2012) became an Orthodox priest. But for Webber the turn to the church fathers was not a *return* to the Christian past, but a *retrieval* of the Christian past for the renewal of the Christian present and future. While others chose “capital-T Tradition” by departing to Catholicism and Orthodoxy, Webber remained a self-identified evangelical—albeit an Anglican one—and continued in the course he had set.

In *Common Roots* Webber identified five key areas of retrieval for evangelicals that correspond broadly to

MISSIONARY KID Webber spent his first seven years in a small village in the Belgian Congo, born around the time this stereopticon photo was taken in the 1930s.

his plan of renewal in the “Chicago Call”: church, worship, theology, mission, and spirituality. These became the focus of his work throughout the remainder of his career. But it was worship to which Webber would devote the lion’s share of his efforts beginning in the early 1980s.

Perhaps Webber’s most widely recognized book is the one that launched this agenda: *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (1985). While *Common Roots* set his theological agenda, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail* tells Webber’s story. In doing so it became emblematic of a movement that would include several generations of evangelicals and continues today. Like Webber many who have taken the Canterbury Trail were first drawn to it through worship.

It is difficult to overstate Webber’s commitment to the renewal of evangelical worship. Between 1985 and 2007, he wrote eight separate books on worship, developed a seven-volume worship curriculum, edited an eight-volume *Library of Christian Worship*, produced six audiovisual worship resources, and wrote some 20 journal articles and over 100 popular articles—all in some way related to the ancient-future renewal of evangelical worship.

Along the way Webber traveled and spoke widely, hosted workshops, was one of the first evangelicals to be admitted to the North American Academy of Liturgy, and founded the Institute for Worship Studies based in Jacksonville, Florida, serving as its first president from 1998 until his death. It continues today.

Webber first coined the phrase “blended worship” as an attempt to describe his desired integration of traditional and contemporary elements in worship, later shifting to the term “convergent.” However he eventually settled on “ancient-future,” which described his approach more accurately while allowing him to address other topics, such as evangelism, formation, spirituality, church unity, and the continuing need for renewal.

Foremost among his other concerns was a desire to recover ancient Christian practices of catechesis. His *Journey to Jesus* curriculum (2001) and *Ancient-Future Evangelism* were both attempts to catalyze this renewal. In the 2000s Webber explored this broader emphasis through his *Ancient-Future* book series, which amplifies his original call: to renew the evangelical church by retrieving the wisdom of the ancient church.

That effort culminated in another public call in 2006, the “Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future” (see p. 20). A group of evangelical theologians drafted it under Webber’s leadership, and 500 evangelical leaders then signed it.

The new “Call” emphasizes the primacy of the biblical narrative and raises up the community of the church as the primary place commitment to the Bible is lived out. It asks evangelicals to turn away from “redefinitions of the church according to business models” and “lecture-oriented, music-driven, performance-centered, and program-controlled models” of worship.

AFTER POSTMODERNITY, WHAT?

What distinguished the *Ancient-Future* series, as well as the new “Call,” from Webber’s previous summonses to renewal was his growing recognition of the postmodern and increasingly post-Christian character of Western society. Webber saw emerging parallels between pre-Christian antiquity and post-Christian postmodernity. These convinced him all the more that the retrieval of ancient faith and practice was the best way to equip the evangelical church to survive—and thrive—in the twenty-first century.

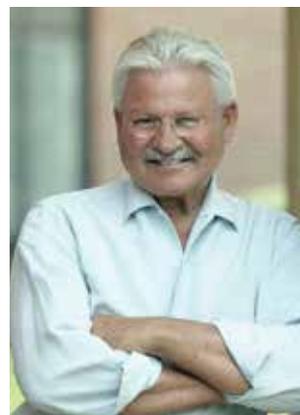
To that end he established the Center for an Ancient Evangelical Future in 2006 at Northern Seminary, founded on the principles of the new “Call.” Webber envisioned the center as an ongoing catalyst for retrieval and renewal, but he died not long after its founding. Reestablished in 2012 the center continues Webber’s work in the renewal of catechesis at Trinity School for Ministry in Pittsburgh, an evangelical seminary in Webber’s beloved Anglican tradition.



THE “EVANGELICAL HARVARD”

Above: Being at Wheaton College meant Webber influenced generations of evangelical students.

GATHERING STRENGTH *Right:* Webber posed for this photo later in life—still energetic but also contemplative.



Through his writing and teaching, Webber was instrumental in awakening American evangelicals to their ancient Christian heritage. Today one can witness the widespread use of ancient liturgical practices and growing interest in the renewal of catechesis by evangelicals and others across a remarkable spectrum of churches (see “A church of the ages?” pp. 46–49). An Internet search on “ancient-future church” will turn up many websites for churches that identify as such.

Webber’s ancient-future movement has proven especially attractive to younger evangelicals. While many remain in churches of the “free church” tradition, others continue to follow Webber on the road to Canterbury and Anglicanism. Wheaton College, Webber’s academic home for over three decades, had only a handful of Anglican students and two Anglican faculty—one of them Webber—when he wrote *Canterbury Trail*. Today dozens of Wheaton faculty and hundreds of students identify as Anglican. It is hard to imagine a more fitting tribute to Bob Webber’s life and work. ☒

Joel Scandrett is assistant professor of historical theology and director of the Robert E. Webber Center at Trinity School for Ministry. He served as one of the editors of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture series and is a priest in the Anglican Church of North America.



WHICH PAST? Are the Raphael Rooms at the Vatican a symbol of tradition to reclaim or excess to avoid?

New challenges, ancient solutions

Written by Bob Webber and a team of advisers, the “Call to an Ancient-Evangelical Future” (2006) critiqued evangelical practices of worship and discipleship that Webber felt were captive to modernity and called Christians to practice a faith consistent with inherited tradition.

In every age the Holy Spirit calls the Church to examine its faithfulness to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, authoritatively recorded in Scripture and handed down through the Church. Thus, while we affirm the global strength and vitality of worldwide Evangelicalism in our day, we believe the North American expression of Evangelicalism needs to be especially sensitive to the new external and internal challenges facing God’s people.

These external challenges include the current cultural milieu and the resurgence of religious and political ideologies. The internal challenges include Evangelical accommodation to civil religion, rationalism, privatism and pragmatism. In light of these challenges, we call Evangelicals to strengthen their witness through a recovery of the faith articulated by the consensus of the ancient Church and its guardians in the traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, the Protestant Reformation and the Evangelical awakenings.

Ancient Christians faced a world of paganism, Gnosticism, and political domination. In the face of heresy and persecution, they understood history through Israel’s story, culminating in the death and resurrection

of Jesus and the coming of God’s Kingdom....

On the Primacy of the Biblical Narrative: We call for a return to the priority of the divinely authorized canonical story of the Triune God... summarized by the early Church in its Rules of Faith....

On the Church, the Continuation of God’s Narrative: We call Evangelicals to take seriously the visible character of the Church....

On the Church’s Theological Reflection on the Continuation of God’s Narrative: We call for the Church’s reflection to remain anchored in the Scriptures in continuity with the theological interpretation learned from the early Fathers....

On the Church’s Worship as Telling and Enacting God’s Narrative: We call for public worship that sings, preaches and enacts God’s story. We call for a renewed consideration of how God ministers to us in baptism, Eucharist, confession, the laying on of hands, marriage, healing and through the charisma of the Spirit....

On Spiritual Formation in the Church as Embodiment of God’s Narrative: We call for a catechetical spiritual formation of the people of God that is based firmly on a Trinitarian biblical narrative....

On the Church’s Embodied Life in the World: We call for a cruciform holiness and commitment to God’s mission in the world... [as] faithful stewards of the created order and bold prophets to our contemporary culture....

Epilogue: We set forth this Call as an ongoing, open-ended conversation. We are aware that we have our blind spots and weaknesses. Therefore, we encourage Evangelicals to engage this Call within educational centers, denominations and local churches through publications and conferences.

We pray that we can move with intention to proclaim a loving, transcendent, Triune God who has become involved in our history. In line with Scripture, creed and tradition, it is our deepest desire to embody God’s purposes in the mission of the Church through our theological reflection, our worship, our spirituality and our life in the world, all the while proclaiming that Jesus is Lord over all creation. —From “A Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future” (also known as the “AEF Call”)

RAFAEL ROOM—THE VATICAN MUSEUM / WIKIMEDIA



Living a “with-God” life

THE FRIENDSHIP OF RICHARD FOSTER AND DALLAS WILLARD
AND THE BIRTH OF RENOVARÉ

Tina Fox

DID YOU DO YOUR DEVOTIONS this morning or perhaps last evening as a matter of habit intended to deepen your Christian walk? Have you recently spent time fasting and praying for someone or something specific? Do you view your giving as an act of discipline? If any of these ring true for you, you may be under the influence of two friends whose commitment to living life “with-God” has resonated across Protestantism for the last half-century.

Some friendships are fleeting, others are seasonal, but only the very rarest of friendships become world-changing. Such was the bond between Richard Foster (b. 1942) and Dallas Willard (1935–2013). Out of their friendship, a movement was birthed—a movement encouraging a return to earlier devotional practices often overlooked by the modern church.

TO HELP PEOPLE GROW IN CHRIST

Foster was fresh out of seminary in 1970 when he began his first solo pastorate at Woodlake Avenue Friends Church, a small Quaker congregation in Southern

“I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS” How can Christians make not just converts but disciples? This was the question Foster and Willard pondered.

California. His parishioner Willard was a respected philosophy professor at the University of Southern California and (despite having been ordained in the Baptist tradition) the church’s worship leader. In reflecting upon their first meeting, Willard assessed his new pastor as “a lovely, smart young man . . . a winning man.” When the two met for the first time, they “started talking and never stopped,” according to Willard.

Like many zealous seminary graduates, Foster harbored world-changing dreams of church growth and denominational recognition. However the day-to-day realities of ministry soon made it obvious to Foster that what he really needed and wanted was to help people grow in Christlikeness. He quickly learned that wasn’t easy work.

Foster remembered his time at Woodland Avenue as a period of wilderness wandering, stretching,



DEEP THOUGHT *Left:* Willard poses on the USC campus c. 1980. He taught philosophy there from 1965 to 2012.

ANCIENT WISDOM *Below:* Among the manuscript pages on the wall behind Foster, pictured here in the early 2010s, are famous Christian quotes on prayer.



reporting that he had heard God say to him; “If you stay in the churches, the university will be closed to you; but if you stay in the university, the churches will be open to you.” By this point people recognized that Willard had a gift for taking abstract concepts and translating them into concrete life principles, both in the classroom and in the church.

Willard taught the small congregation about the books of Romans and Acts, the Sermon on the Mount, and the spiritual disciplines (see p. 25). His teaching provided listeners with a fresh voice and insights on how to live the “with-God life” as a daily reality. Willard did not want faith to be simply an intellectual exercise, but something that makes a discernible everyday difference.

Many of Willard’s teachings from this time would eventually be collected into books; these books have become classics in the 40 years since he first fleshed out these concepts in the small Quaker congregation. For example his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount formed the basis for *The Divine Conspiracy* (1998).

Willard and Foster met together frequently during Foster’s pastorate. Whenever the demands of ministry discouraged Foster, he would get together with his friend—sometimes as often as every other day—to discuss and pray for the people in their fellowship. Their church was not an easy one; God sent people to them who were filled with great needs.

Willard met with other church members too. Foster later recalled how Willard met once a week with a construction worker named Tony to pray and study the Scriptures. Later Foster found out that while Dallas’s wife, Jane Willard, was hospitalized, Tony had fasted and prayed for her for three days—all while working on a construction site.

“THE GREAT OMISSION”

While resources on spiritual disciplines abound now, this was not the case during the early 1970s. Woodlake Avenue Friends Church became a “disciple incubator”—practicing and cultivating the spiritual disciplines in community.

Both Willard and Foster felt that the modern-day church had lost touch with the classic spiritual disciplines. Some Protestants had developed a fear of works-righteousness, or trying to earn salvation by

learning, and transformation. He gave the small church everything he had, but it was not enough. He felt he did not possess the power, substance, or depth to effect lasting impact in people’s lives.

Faced with the ever-increasing needs and demands of the congregation, Foster came to desire and seek a deeper way of being with God. While many factors were at work in Foster’s life and in the church, his ongoing conversations with his new mentor ended up being the catalyst to bring the change he sought. Willard helped Foster integrate his academic “head knowledge” into a new worldview, a different way of being—what Foster would later call a “with-God” lifestyle.

Foster did the preaching, but he and Willard both taught at the church. Years later Foster quipped, “When I taught people might come, but when Dallas taught they brought their tape recorders. Me too.” Willard had felt a call from God early on to work in academia,

our actions, and threw the disciplined baby out with the works-righteousness bath water. A classic tenet of the Protestant Reformation is that people are saved by grace through faith alone. Foster and Willard believed this, but felt personal effort was still required for growth in Christlikeness. Willard spoke to this reality in *The Great Omission* (2006):

Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. Grace, you know, does not just have to do with forgiveness of sins alone.

As Willard and Foster's friendship formed, they discussed their sense that evangelicalism focused only on cultivating a personal, saving encounter with God through Jesus Christ. Modern-day evangelicalism emphasizes where a person will spend eternity rather than living the with-God life in the here and now. Willard, however, wanted others to see following Jesus as an entire life process—not only a one-time decision. Foster once told Willard about a recent convert who had accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior. Willard's response was, "I hope that leads him into accepting Jesus as his life."

Just as Paul advised the Philippians to continue to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), Willard and Foster sought ways to do this together within their small community. They began to see growth and transformation, in themselves and others, and their fellowship grew.

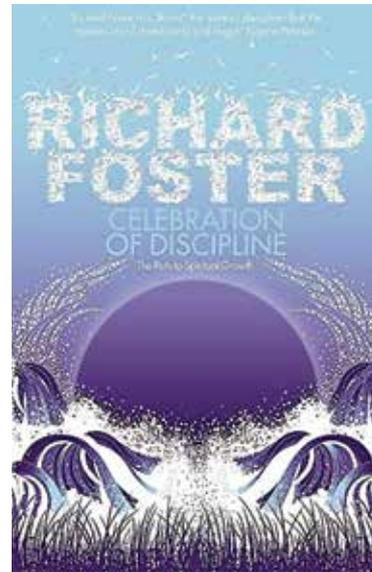
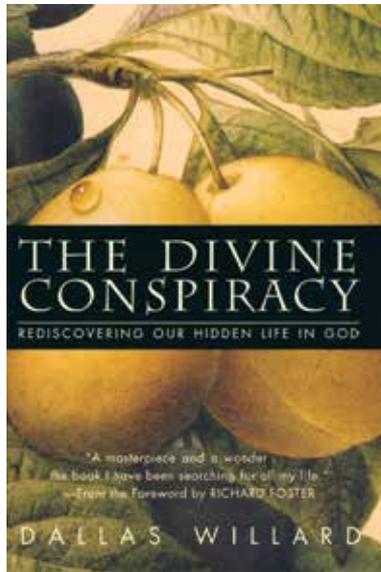
The small Quaker community explored spiritual disciplines many Protestants had left untried or viewed with apprehension, and they learned about both practical and spiritual dimensions. For instance they discovered that while fasting one might have caffeine withdrawal, and they learned to prepare people in advance for such hurdles during their fasts. They experienced different ways of praying and challenged one another to deepen their trust in God. The church utilized disciplines of silence and solitude and found they heard from God in their new expressions of the old ways.

A TIME TO PREACH, A TIME TO WRITE

Foster's passion for writing grew as he served as pastor—one of several indicators that, after four years, it might be time for him to leave the Woodlake Avenue Friends Church. He was nervous about Willard's response, but Willard reassured Foster that he would still "bring you the word of God as I know it and...love you no matter what you do."

After a process of intensive individual and group discernment, Foster left the church in the summer of

CELEBRATION OF DIVINE LOVE Willard and Foster's most famous books have all been published and republished many times.



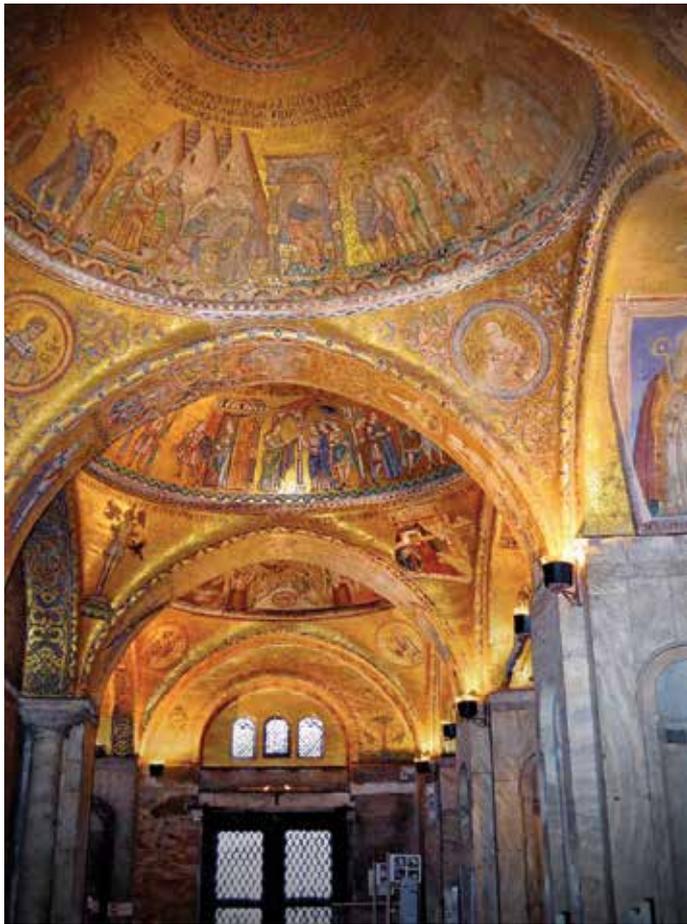
1974 and moved to Newburg, Oregon, to work at a larger church with a team of pastors. He preached often and taught classes at nearby George Fox College, his alma mater. This move provided him more opportunity for writing, culminating in 1978 with the publication of his first book, *Celebration of Discipline*.

The book, which sparked a return to classic spiritual disciplines as a means of transformation within the church, grew out of the friendship and community that Foster had shared with Willard and the Woodlake Avenue Friends congregation. The iconic opening lines highlight the problem Foster had identified in the church of his day:

Superficiality is the curse of our age. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people. The goal of the book was to help people go deeper in living the with-God life, as Foster and his congregants had personally experienced.

After the success of *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster found himself speaking with many people about the concepts in his book. He quickly realized that those attempting to grow in Christlikeness saw little success and became discouraged. Many had read his book and sensed the need in their lives for deeper transformation but were clueless about what to do next.

The main problem Foster identified was confusion of the means (spiritual disciplines) with the end (Christlikeness), which caused a lot of frustration and very little actual transformation. More instruction, encouragement, and support were needed. Willard had defined spiritual disciplines as "activities we engage in that are within our power and enable us to do what we



cannot do by direct effort." Less trying and more training were needed to live the "with-God" life.

A CONTINUAL RENEWAL

Out of Foster's desire to equip people to become deeply formed followers of Jesus, the organization Renovaré (a play on "renovation") was born on November 21, 1988. Foster immediately started recruiting like-minded friends to be part of this equipping organization.

He naturally made one of his first calls to Willard. Willard agreed but wanted to make sure the leaders of the organization would still be doing the actual work of ministry themselves, because living out one's faith in daily life was paramount for him.

Foster later spoke about Willard's contribution to Renovaré over the years:

He brought a rootedness to what we were trying to articulate. So much of what we were doing was inspired by, motivated by, what he taught when we were together, especially during that first dozen years or so when we were teaching ourselves.

Renovaré sought (and continues to seek) to help people become like Jesus through print and online resources, providing multiple spiritual formation opportunities for individuals and groups. Eventually the organization developed the Renovaré Institute for

"SAVIOR, TEACHER, LORD, AND FRIEND" Foster and Willard hoped to lead people to experience both the intimacy and the majesty of relationship with Christ.

Christian Spiritual Formation, a two-year online and in-person discipleship school. While the specific offerings of Renovaré have changed with the times, the covenant promise made by those involved continues to be this prayer, drafted around 1989 by Foster and Willard along with James Bryan Smith and Bill Vaswig:

In utter dependence upon Jesus Christ as my ever-living Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend, I will seek continual renewal through spiritual exercises, spiritual gifts, and acts of service.

Foster later recalled that it was at Willard's urging that they added the description "Friend" to characterize Christ's relationship with us.

TILL DEATH US DO PART

Throughout the years Willard and Foster remained close friends and a source of strength and inspiration for one another. After Willard's death Foster wrote in a tribute called "If Death My Friend and Me Divide" about a trip they had made to Italy together:

We were touring one of the many art galleries in Florence and Dallas had some special insight or pearl of wisdom about every painting. Every single painting! I was reduced to saying things like, "Oh, yeah, sure, I knew that!"

Finally, I confessed, "You know, Dallas, I guess there is this huge gap in my education in Renaissance art." He smiled and said simply, "Oh, that's all right. You will have all of eternity to fill in the gap."

Willard died from pancreatic cancer on May 8, 2013, at age 77, and Foster went to spend time with him just days before he died. Expressing his sadness about seeing his dear friend for the last time, Foster said, "Dallas, we may not see each other again." Willard reminded him that they would, indeed, see each other again. He had often taught that we are "unceasing spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God's great universe."

As Foster summarized Willard's life and character in his tribute, he spoke of his friend's "unadulterated goodness." Were the roles reversed, and Willard were eulogizing the life of Foster, he'd likely have said something similar.

Both men learned to live the life of faith more deeply because of their friendship. Willard and Foster challenged each other to live the renovated, renewed, abundant life and, through their friendship, challenged the church to live it as well. ☩

Tina Fox is the pastor of Grace United Methodist Church in Washington Court House, Ohio.

Life in God's Kingdom: an excerpt from *Spirit of the Disciplines*

And so in the early 1970s, I began to teach the disciplines, at first with a little hesitation and concern about what the response would be. At that time, I was intermittently teaching in several Protestant churches of various denominations. All of them had in common a firmly entrenched tradition of scorn for "ascetic" practices such as solitude, silence, and fasting.

My hearers seemed to have two major concerns about them. They wondered how these specific actions could be done except either as a way of meriting forgiveness or as way of extorting favorable actions from God, but to my surprise they offered no out-and-out resistance to the idea of spiritual disciplines. Just the opposite, in fact. My teaching about them almost universally met with a friendly interest and usually with some attempt to learn how to do the things discussed. . . .

Our tangible need and hunger for the spiritual disciplines do not by themselves make clear why we need them and how they fit into God's creative and redemptive action upon and within human life. And above all, they do not show how the practice of the disciplines is to be integrated with the great truth recovered with Protestantism—that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works or merit. It is precisely obscurity and confusion here that led to the abuses of the disciplines [which] history reveals and ultimately to today's exclusion of them from the mainstream of Protestant religious life.

PRAYER NOT PENANCE

What do I mean? Centuries ago, disciplines such as fasting, service, and giving were confused with meritorious works, as well as with a useless and destructive "penance." So what resulted was a general failure to understand or accept the wonderful, positive functions of those disciplines as part of the course of the human personality's full redemption.

We've all heard of "cheap grace." But "cheap grace" as a concept didn't just come merely from our wanting to have God's mercy and bounty at bargain basement prices. I believe that the misunderstanding of the spiritual disciplines' place in life has been responsible for Protestantism's adopting "cheap grace" as the dominant mode of its recent existence.

So what is needed, then, is a theology of the disciplines for the spiritual life. We need a foundation, a



STUDENT TESTED, READER APPROVED Willard conducts a seminar at George Fox Evangelical Seminary in Oregon in 2008. Many of his books were based on notes from teaching in both church and academy.

practical, workable theology of them. We must understand why the disciplines are integral to meaningful life in Christ. We must be clear about the essential part they play in the full and effective presentation of the gospel and the truth about life in God's Kingdom. . . .

In shaping our own list of spiritual disciplines, we should keep in mind that very few disciplines can be regarded as absolutely indispensable for a healthy spiritual life and work, though some are obviously more important than others. Practicing a range of activities that have proven track records across the centuries will keep us from erring. And if, later, other activities are really more what we need, our progress won't be seriously hindered, and we'll probably be led into them. . . .

Let's list those activities that have had a wide and profitable use among disciples of Christ, and approach them in a prayerful, experimental way. . . .

Disciplines of Abstinence: solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, sacrifice.

Disciplines of Engagement: study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, submission.

—From the book *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* by Dallas Willard. Copyright © 1988 by Dallas Willard. Reprinted by permission of HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

Responses to modernity



Window honoring Luther, South Carolina, 1872

- 1830** The “Plymouth Brethren” first form in Dublin.
- 1832** Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell join forces to re-establish “the primitive church.”
- 1838** Oxford Movement theologians begin an edition of the church fathers’ writings
- 1843** German Reformed theologian John Williamson Nevin publishes *The Anxious Bench*, critiquing American revivalism.
- 1845** John Henry Newman, a leader in the Oxford Movement, converts to Catholicism. Nevin and Philip Schaff are cleared of heresy charges.
- 1846** Nevin publishes *The Mystical Presence*.

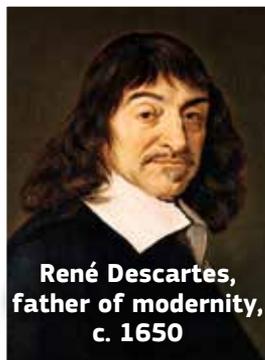
—**1877** Schaff publishes *The Creeds of Christendom*.

—**1888** Schaff founds the American Society of Church History.

—**1922** Anglican G. K. Chesterton’s critique of modernity leads him to convert to Catholicism.

—**1928** The Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius is founded to promote better relations between Eastern and Western Christians.

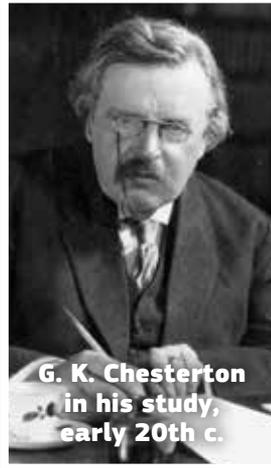
—**1931** Catholic Yves Congar publishes *Divided Christendom*, urging



René Descartes, father of modernity, c. 1650

ecumenical relations. Lutheran Gustaf Aulén publishes *Christus Victor* on early church atonement theology.

—**1933** C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and other Oxford Christians form an informal discussion group, the “Inklings,” which will critique modernity.



G. K. Chesterton in his study, early 20th c.

—**1937** Marie-Dominique Chenu calls Catholics back to the fathers in *A Theological School*.

—**1942** Catholic Jean Daniélou begins work on an edition of the church fathers.

—**1943** Daniélou publishes *Platonism and Mystical Theology* on Gregory of Nyssa.

—**1944** Henri de Lubac publishes *Corpus Mysticum*, an attempt to renew Catholic Eucharistic thought.

—**1946** The Catholic movement to “return to the sources” is given the name *nouvelle théologie*.

—**1947** Catholic Joseph Lortz publishes *The Reformation*, prompting the “Catholic Luther” movement.

—**1952** Lewis publishes *Mere Christianity*.

—**1962** Vatican II begins.

—**1965** Vatican II ends. Its documents profoundly influence Protestant and Catholic liturgical renewal and ecumenical cooperation.

—**1968** Methodist Tom Oden begins to doubt his liberal theological commitments.

—**1969** Robert Webber becomes convinced of the need for a more robust response to modernity.

—**1970** Richard Foster meets Dallas Willard.

—**1972** Webber becomes Episcopalian. The Catholic magazine *Communio* is founded.

Attempts to recover the spirit of the first Christians are almost as old as Christianity itself, but we focus here on those that arose in some way as a response to problems of the modern world.

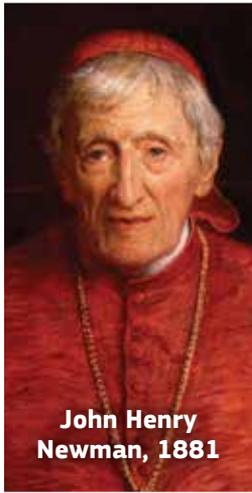
1974 Kathleen Norris moves from Manhattan to South Dakota and begins to reclaim her faith.

1977 Webber and colleagues issue the "Chicago Call." Methodists Albert Outler and Edmund Robb Jr. found A Foundation for Theological Education.

1978 Foster publishes *Celebration of Discipline*. Webber publishes *Common Roots*.

1979 Oden publishes *Agenda for Theology*.

1980 Methodist David Steinmetz publishes "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis" attacking modern biblical criticism.



John Henry Newman, 1881

1981 Catholic convert Alasdair MacIntyre publishes *After Virtue*.

1984 Evangelical-turned-Episcopalian Thomas Howard publishes *Evangelical Is Not Enough*. The next year he becomes Catholic.

1985 Webber publishes *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*.

1988 Foster founds Renovaré. Willard publishes *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

1986 Presbyterian minister Scott Hahn converts to Catholicism and tries to improve Catholic biblical literacy. The ecumenical magazine *Touchstone* is founded.

1989 Lutheran Richard John Neuhaus founds the Institute on Religion and Public Life and its journal *First Things*. The next year he becomes Catholic.

1993 Norris publishes *Dakota*. Episcopal pro-life activist Frederica Mathewes-Green converts to Eastern Orthodoxy.



Window honoring the Eucharist, Ohio, late 19th c.

1994 The first Evangelicals and Catholics Together statement is released. Presbyterian Mark Noll publishes *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

1995 Shane Claiborne begins the Simple Way community.

1998 The first volume of the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* comes out. Webber founds the Institute for Worship Studies. Willard publishes *The Divine Conspiracy*. Methodist William Abraham publishes *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*.

1999 Roman Catholics and Lutherans sign the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

2003 Lutheran-turned-Catholic Robert Wilken publishes *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove founds Rutba House.

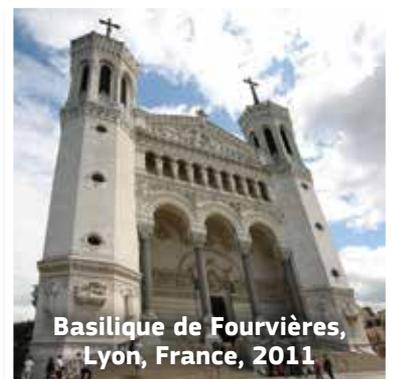
2004 "12 Marks of a New Monasticism" is released.

2006 Webber issues the "Call to an Ancient Evangelical Future" and founds the Center for an Ancient Evangelical Future.

2008 Oden establishes the Center for Early African Christianity.

2012 The Center for an Ancient Evangelical Future is re-established.

2017 Journalist Rod Dreher publishes *The Benedict Option*.



Basilique de Fourvières, Lyon, France, 2011



Going behind Aquinas

NOUVELLE THÉOLOGIE AND THE CATHOLIC RETRIEVAL OF MYSTERY

Hans Boersma

IN 1946 in a world shattered by war, the Catholic Church stood as an unmoved landmark. For Catholics the church offered refuge from the chaos of the twentieth century and a moral and intellectual vantage point from which to criticize the secular world and offer a constructive alternative. The bedrock of this confident, assertive Catholicism was the philosophy and theology of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), enshrined by Leo XIII in his 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris* as “the special bulwark and glory of the Catholic Faith.”

The intellectual system of Neo-Thomism, built on Aquinas’s teachings, claimed to represent timeless, fixed, objective truth drawn from two sources: rational inquiry into the created, natural world and the supernatural truth revealed by God in Scripture and tradition. But even as Aquinas’s teachings gained ground in the nineteenth century, other scholars were claiming that divine revelation must be understood as part of time-bound processes studied by historical scholarship.

MOTHER OF ALL MEETINGS Vatican II reshaped Catholicism for decades—and *nouvelle théologie* was one huge reason why.

Early twentieth-century popes fought these views, which they dubbed “modernist.” Pius X explicitly condemned them in 1907. And yet no condemnations from the Vatican could keep Catholic intellectuals from the scholarly study of the past. Cautiously, with one eye on the papal condemnations, some young scholars began to tiptoe back onto the forbidden ground.

A FRENCH BOMBSHELL

These scholars sought much greater openness to ecumenism and a recovery of much more ancient liturgical and Scripture study practices, and they had a generally more positive outlook on modern thought and cultural trends. So it was that in 1946, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, leading Dominican scholar at the Pontifical

FATHER OF ALL THEOLOGIANS For centuries Aquinas's thought had formed the bedrock of Catholic theology. (He is pictured here at the center of a 15th-c painting.)

University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome, found himself perusing a collection of writings from France. Garrigou-Lagrange grew more deeply concerned with every page he turned. Indeed he had every reason to be troubled. Hardly the first, these writings were the latest in a line of attacks on Neo-Thomism from the Jesuit faculty at Fourvière in France.

Patristics scholar Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) had settled in Fourvière-Lyon in 1929, and his influence was spreading. He taught at the Catholic University of Lyons but he lived at the Fourvière scholasticate (a type of seminary) just outside the city. De Lubac's writings caused a stir. His 1944 book on the Eucharist, *Corpus Mysticum* (*The Mystical Body*), seemed a thinly veiled attack on the traditional Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, promulgated in the thirteenth century, that the Eucharistic elements became the actual body and blood of Christ.

Only two years later, de Lubac directly challenged Neo-Thomism with *The Supernatural* (1946). This book attacked the separation taught by Thomists between nature and the supernatural, between philosophy and theology, and between church and world. Furthermore it reached back beyond Aquinas to earlier medieval and ancient patristic sources for support.

De Lubac's influence was multiplied when a steady stream of his students took up the pen. Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) moved to Fourvière from Switzerland in 1929 to study theology. There de Lubac drew his attention to early fathers such as Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Balthasar wrote later that his teacher "showed us the way beyond the scholastic stuff to the fathers of the church and generously lent us all his own notes and extracts." In 1939 Balthasar wrote "The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves," which deliberately went back behind Aquinas and the scholastics to the foundational Christian theologians who shaped the faith before 700 AD (see *CH* issue #80) as an enduring source for Christian doctrine.

LOOKING TO THE EAST

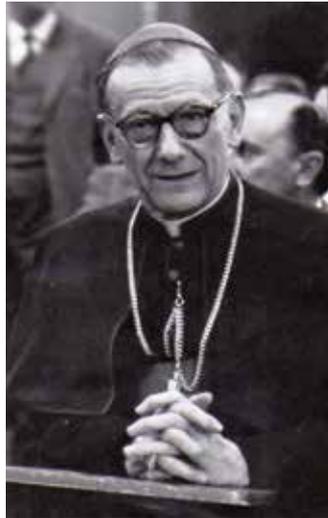
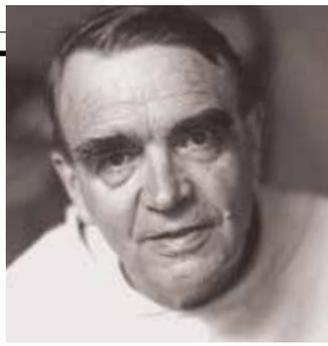
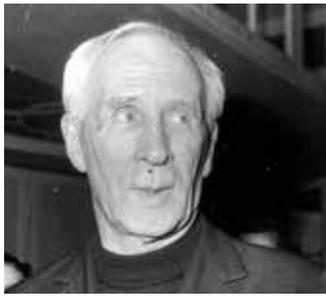
Jean Daniélou (1905–1974), another protégé of de Lubac, also felt the deep attraction of the spiritual writings and scriptural interpretive methods of the church fathers. Daniélou like his fellow students in Fourvière, looked to de Lubac as his academic and spiritual mentor. Together with de Lubac, he started republishing the church fathers in the *Sources Chrétiennes* (*Christian Sources*) series—initially focusing on the Eastern fathers, whose approach diverged more sharply from Neo-Thomism than that of Western fathers. In 1943 he also published a groundbreaking book on Gregory of Nyssa, *Platonism and Mystical Theology*.



Another critic, a young Jesuit theologian named Henri Bouillard (1908–1981), joined the Fourvière faculty in 1941. He published a book in 1944 called *Conversion and Grace in Thomas Aquinas*, which some saw as an attack on Thomism and on the need for divine grace in the conversion process.

Meanwhile up north in Belgium, Dominicans such as Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895–1990) had also been questioning Neo-Thomism. Chenu, professor of the history of dogma at the seminary Le Saulchoir, had done his doctorate under Garrigou-Lagrange at the Angelicum, as the Pontifical University was usually called. But the two theologians' approaches could hardly be more different.

Chenu appealed for a "return" to the sources and for the "historical method." Suspicious of perennial theological systems such as Aquinas's, he said that



IS THIS THEOLOGY REALLY NEW? Clockwise from left: De Lubac, Chenu, Congar, Daniélou, and Balthasar all challenged the dominance of Aquinas and recommended listening to the church fathers.

Christian experience and the church's liturgy were key sources for Christian doctrine. In the 1930s Chenu advocated alongside the *jocistes* (the Young Christian Workers organization) for better labor conditions for ordinary workers. To some this was dangerously close to Marxism. Chenu himself jokingly commented that some thought there were two Chenus, "one old medievalist . . . and a kind of scoundrel who runs in the lines of fire of the holy church."

But there was really only one Chenu, and to Garrigou-Lagrange his student's academic work and his social engagement both stemmed from the same troubling starting point. In 1931 Chenu's former student Yves Congar (1904–1995) had joined him at Le Saulchoir. Like his teacher the young Dominican priest overstepped commonly accepted ecclesial boundaries. His *Divided Christendom* (1937) was one of the first Catholic works that seriously engaged ecumenical relations, not only with the Orthodox but also with Protestants. Going backward also meant looking outward.

To Neo-Thomist Garrigou-Lagrange, who later earned himself the moniker "the sacred monster of Thomism," these writings all seemed like a betrayal of truth, trading Aquinas's intellectual approach for something much more nebulous. He countered with a vehement article in the journal *Angelicum* in 1946 entitled "La Nouvelle Théologie, où va-t-elle?" (published in English as "Where Is the New Theology Leading Us?").

Here he attacked the relativism that he saw as inherent in the approach of Bouillard and de Lubac. He

also rejected the evolutionary ideas of their colleague Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) and defended transubstantiation. In each of these problem areas, Garrigou-Lagrange was convinced he was witnessing modernism. The name "new theology" stuck, giving de Lubac and his colleagues an ironic name for their return to old sources.

FROM CONDEMNATION TO EXONERATION

Initially the success of this new-yet-old theology seemed far from guaranteed. In 1950 both de Lubac and Bouillard were exiled from Fourvière and moved to Paris. Some of de Lubac's most controversial books were put on the Index of Prohibited Books. In the same year, Pius XII's encyclical *Humani generis* condemned their theological views. In 1954 the *jociste* French worker-priests were forced to abandon the factories, and Chenu moved to Rouen. Congar was exiled from Le Saulchoir and eventually ended up in Strasbourg.

Yet by 1960 de Lubac and Congar were put on the preparatory Theological Commission for the Second Vatican Council. Ultimately Vatican II exonerated and perhaps even enshrined *nouvelle théologie*. The word they had used for retrieval of the church fathers, *ressourcement*, became a byword of the council. And its effects tracked with their program (see sidebar).

After the council though, they all took different paths. Chenu remained interested in contemporary culture. Theologians, he thought, had the prophetic task of reading the "signs of the times." He highly prized the autonomy of nature that modernity had brought and was optimistic about humanity's future. Eventually he would mentor both Gustavo Gutiérrez, founder of liberation theology, and Matthew Fox, founder of the interfaith "creation spirituality" movement. Congar's outlook mirrored that of his former teacher, Chenu.

By contrast de Lubac and Balthasar became skeptical of further reform. De Lubac felt secularists had hijacked the council's agenda, calling them the "para-Council." He had turned to the church fathers to combat modernity, but it seemed his colleagues were now lapsing into the very secularism he had always resisted.

These differences came out in the open when the two groups established separate theological journals. Chenu and his friends founded *Concilium* in 1965, which aimed to spur further reforms in the church.



“SACRED MONSTER” Left: Garrigou-Lagrange (back row, far left) poses with other Dominicans during his novitiate in the early 1900s. Much later he would become concerned about young scholars at Fourvière (above right).

Meanwhile Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), Balthasar, and others established *Communio* in 1972 to shore up traditional teaching. The former accused the latter of stifling the progress of Vatican II. The latter worried about progressive Catholic theologians capitulating to secularism.

BRINGING GOD BACK DOWNSTAIRS

Despite such differences both groups focused on one underlying issue: bringing back ancient mystery. The Latin term *mysterium* has a sacramental connotation; in much Christian thought, *mysterium* and *sacramentum* had been used identically. *Nouvelle* theologians believed that a sacramental outlook on life is needed to combat modernity. Modernity after all had separated

heaven and earth, philosophy and theology, and nature and the supernatural. It had banished God upstairs to leave the main floor empty. The *nouvelle* theologians believed that Neo-Thomism had unwittingly contributed to this rift by treating faith as entirely separate from everyday concerns.

The only way to bring God back onto the main floor is by understanding that the sacraments are part of a grand sacred mystery present in everyday life. In his teaching on the Eucharist, de Lubac soft-pedaled transubstantiation without actually denying it; he was convinced that “the Eucharist makes the church.” The final purpose of the Eucharist is not Christ’s presence in the bread. Instead its ultimate reality is church unity.

When *nouvelle* theologians rejected Neo-Thomist definitions of truth, they did not believe they were lapsing into relativism. Rather they were stating that God’s capital-T Truth is the eternal mystery in which small-t human truth claims to participate. The movement recognized that the world around us contains mystery that escapes the outward senses. Instead of toppling Catholic thought, it sought to retrieve pre-modern theological tradition and recover the divine mystery of Christ as the heart of all created being. ☒

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Vatican II: 101

WHEN: Announced in 1959, convened in 1962, and lasted until 1965

WHERE: In Rome, at the Vatican

WHO: Pope John XXIII (1881–1963) convened the council with the express interest of addressing the issues of modernity; it was continued by his successor Paul VI (1897–1978). Around 2,600 Roman Catholic bishops, clergy, and members of male religious orders attended, plus invited theological experts and Eastern Orthodox and Protestant observers. After a complaint 23 Catholic women were admitted as auditors.

WHAT HAPPENED: The council released 16 documents. It revised the liturgy, included more Scripture in the service, encouraged clergy to celebrate Mass in the vernacular, and made the service less ornate and more streamlined. It also released some restrictions on religious orders and encouraged dialogue with Protestants and with non-Christian religions (especially Judaism). The initial motivation behind many of these reforms came chiefly from the *nouvelle* theologians and their emphasis on Scripture and the church fathers.



PIPES TOGETHER Richard John Neuhaus (left) and Charles “Chuck” Colson (below) founded Evangelicals and Catholics Together to address issues of modernity.



25 years of talking together

In 1994 First Things published “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium.” Though no one expected it at the time, it became the first of nine statements in a still-ongoing project. Christian History spoke with Timothy George, dean and professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School and one of the coeditors of Evangelicals and Catholics Together at Twenty (2015), to learn more.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY: Tell us how ECT got its start.
TIMOTHY GEORGE: It came from the friendship between evangelical Charles Colson (1931–2012) and Catholic Richard John Neuhaus (1936–2009). They had a concern that evangelicals and Catholics needed to dialogue about cultural issues impacting both of them. “J.I.” (Jim) Packer (b. 1926), Tom Oden, and I were invited to be an evangelical presence and voice. On the Catholic side, contributors included Avery Dulles (1918–2008) and George Weigel (b. 1951), along with other theologians and some bishops. It’s not an official ecumenical dialogue sponsored by official church bodies. We were brought together because we had an interest in this topic.

CH: What happened after the first statement?
TG: We began to receive “incoming.” That’s a military phrase for when you’re in a battle and they’re shooting rockets at you. Some left-wing Catholics read it as a covert effort in the culture wars. But most of the “incoming” was directed to Chuck, Jim, me,

and Tom, telling us we were betraying the faith of the Reformation. I think that was a false charge, and we tried to answer it along the way and came out stronger because of it. We’re not as controversial as when we came out with the first statement. In fact, we’ve been very successful. Here are the two largest religious communities in North America, and they’d previously had no dialogue. The cause has been taken up, and official dialogues are now going on.

CH: What’s your process?
TG: We alternate between issues of public policy versus theological problems; we’ve released statements on

the sanctity of life and religious freedom, but also on the Virgin Mary and Scripture. We are a theologically driven project, but have a wider concern for questions of culture. We work for about two years, beginning with an opening meeting in which there are short papers, discussions, and brainstorming. In the next couple of sessions academic papers are debated. We winnow all that material into a draft, then edit that. Right now, the project we’re working on is called “The Gift of the Child”: it has both theological and cultural dimensions, and we’re in draft stage.

CH: Which topics have been the most and least difficult? Controversial?
TG: The most difficult topic internally was Mary. The most controversial for readers was “The Gift of Salvation” (1997) on justification by faith. We released that statement two years prior to the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification. We got a lot of pushback.

There wasn’t as much controversy about the next statement, “Your Word Is Truth” (2002), which I think is our best. It deals with Scripture and tradition and authority. That’s still the most difficult and church-dividing issue between us. I’m proud of what we came up with. Overall the least controversial may be our statement on holiness. Some of the statements on public policy issues—sanctity of life, religious freedom, marriage—advanced discussion in good ways.

CH: What do you see as your primary legacy?
TG: I think we’ve created a spirituality of ecumenism and Christian unity. We pray together, share the Scriptures together, share a common Christian life together. At the core of our movement is that we are brothers and sisters in the Lord.

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS—LOS ANGELES TIMES STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS / WIKIMEDIA
CHARLES COLSON WITH PIPE—WASHINGTON POST



Freedom for tradition

THE LUTHERAN TENDENCY TO DEFY DENOMINATIONAL CATEGORIES HAS BEEN A STRENGTH AS THEY SEEK RENEWAL

Robert Saler

LUTHERANS are quintessentially Protestant. No, wait, actually Lutherans are Catholicism-lite. Martin Luther went too far and broke the church. Actually, Luther did not go far enough and retained too much.

Can you fit a round peg into a square hole? Doing so might be easier than trying to categorize the Lutheran tradition. Lutherans often exist in an ambiguous space where they are destined to please no one. But in recent decades this “not quite fitting in” has also proved fertile for renewal.

A buzzword for Luther was “freedom.” As many theologians of his time did, he changed the spelling of his name. In his case it was from Ludder to Luther—derived from the Greek word for freedom, *elutheria*—because freedom was at the heart of the gospel for him. However Luther’s freedom was not what would become the stereotypically Protestant freedom “from.” While Luther rejected aspects of medieval Catholicism he found to be problematic novelties—purgatory, indulgences, papal authority, transubstantiation—he also defended Catholic practices that many later Protestants would reject, such

CAN WE DO NO OTHER? The 20th c. led many Lutherans to reconsider the 16th, recalled by this famous image of Luther before the emperor at Worms.

as icons, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and infant baptism.

Luther advocated a freedom “for” tradition: the Christian is free to engage the substance of the faith across time and to gauge to what extent a given practice conveys the gospel in its time and place. To the extent that it does, he thought, it should be retained. Thus for modern Lutherans the road to recovery of tradition has often run straight back through Luther.

HEALING OLD DIVISIONS

Over the last hundred years or so, this freedom for tradition has placed Lutherans in an ecumenically rich context. The assumed anti-Catholic position of a number of Lutheran settings in the United States and Europe gave way to an impulse to maximize the gifts of the broader Christian tradition. In fact the Lutheran World Federation, a global confederation of churches,



LUTHER AND... Many modern Lutherans value the work of Luther in biblical scholarship (represented at left by a 1522 edition of his *German New Testament*) and his emphasis on grace (represented by a modern version of his seal below), but they also seek to relate him to the broader Christian tradition.

worked closely with the Vatican in 2017 to “observe”—not *celebrate*, but *observe*—the 500th anniversary of the 95 Theses. This commemoration of the Reformation was a far more ecumenical and peace-seeking event than it would have been even a few decades ago.

This cooperation grew out of the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, signed by both the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (which operates with the blessing of the Vatican). In the Declaration both Lutherans and Catholics agreed that the question of how we are justified by God and what role faith and works play in that justification is no longer a church-dividing issue, as unity exists on essentials:

The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration.

The impact of the document is muted somewhat because Roman Catholics do not follow Lutherans in seeing justification as the core doctrine around which all other doctrines must revolve. But the agreement did set the stage for the ecumenical efforts that bore fruit in the 500th anniversary commemoration.

A CATHOLIC LUTHER?

Indeed modern Luther scholars have worked in recent decades to separate the actual Luther from his popular image in both Christian and secular culture: the first modern man, bravely bucking all authority in the name of unlimited choice. The recovery of an image of Luther

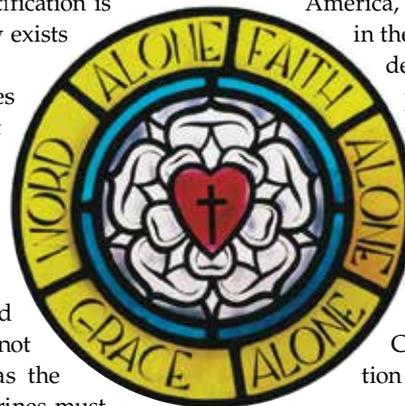
far closer to Catholicism than to what American Protestantism looks like today has been attempted for both scholarly and devotional reasons.

Theologians and historians such as Paul Hinlicky, Christine Helmer, David Steinmetz (see “We’re not done with virtue yet,” pp.

41–44), David Yeago, and Michael Root have all written of Luther as a troubled Catholic thinker whose expulsion from the church did not cause him to celebrate untrammelled individualism.

In his own lifetime, some of Luther’s most venomous critiques were against “enthusiasts” (most of the breakaway Protestant groups), who he found inattentive to the need for a deep understanding of church, sacraments, and tradition. Recent popes such as Benedict XVI and Francis have expressed their admiration for Luther’s zeal as well as aspects of his theology. But this zeal along with his venom toward his opponents has given Lutherans the need to mend other resulting deep rifts.

In 1994 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the largest body of Lutherans in the United States, issued a formal declaration to the Jewish people repudiating and lamenting Luther’s later writings against the Jews, acknowledged as horrific by modern readers. In 2010 the Lutheran World Federation also issued a formal apology to the global Mennonite Church for Lutheran participation in persecuting Anabaptists.



PARADIGMS NEW AND ANCIENT

In this ecumenical mood, Lutherans have become particularly interested in recovering the riches of the early church; they want to see how the church fathers agree with, but also challenge, classical Lutheran theological and ecclesial structures. Lutheran scholars in Finland—in close geographic proximity to centers of Eastern Orthodoxy—have, for several decades, been rereading Luther in light of his insistence that Christ is truly present in the faith of the believer and

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN GERMAN. WITTENBERG 21 SEPTEMBER 1522 | PETER HORREE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO
CATHOLIC CHURCH—GOSPEL COALITION



that the believer might gradually become more and more attuned to this presence in thoughts, words, and actions.

In one striking example, in his sermon “All Become One Cake,” Luther argued that taking the Eucharist makes us one “cake” with Christ and with all the world:

I am now one cake with Christ, so that no suffering can assail me again. . . . Also with us . . . we all become one cake and we eat each other.

This is quite close to ancient notions of *theosis*, the gradual divinization of humanity, which is an active aspect of Eastern Orthodox thought today. The Finnish scholars have argued that *theosis* captures more of the traditional character of Lutheran thought than an understanding of justification that sees it simply as God declaring us righteous for Christ’s sake even though no fundamental change has taken place.

While these arguments have not been accepted by all scholars of Luther, or by all Lutherans, they certainly link Luther more broadly to the logic of salvation characteristic of the early church, where a key maxim was Athanasius’s statement in *Cur Deus Homo*: “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.”

Meanwhile the Lutheran communion (like so many others) is experiencing explosive growth in the global South, even as it declines in historic centers like Europe and North America. This challenges standard Western conceptions of the natural and supernatural; in contexts such as Africa, South America, and Asia, pastors go about their work with active assumptions regarding ancestors, saints, demons, and supernatural intervention of spiritual forces into the natural order of things.

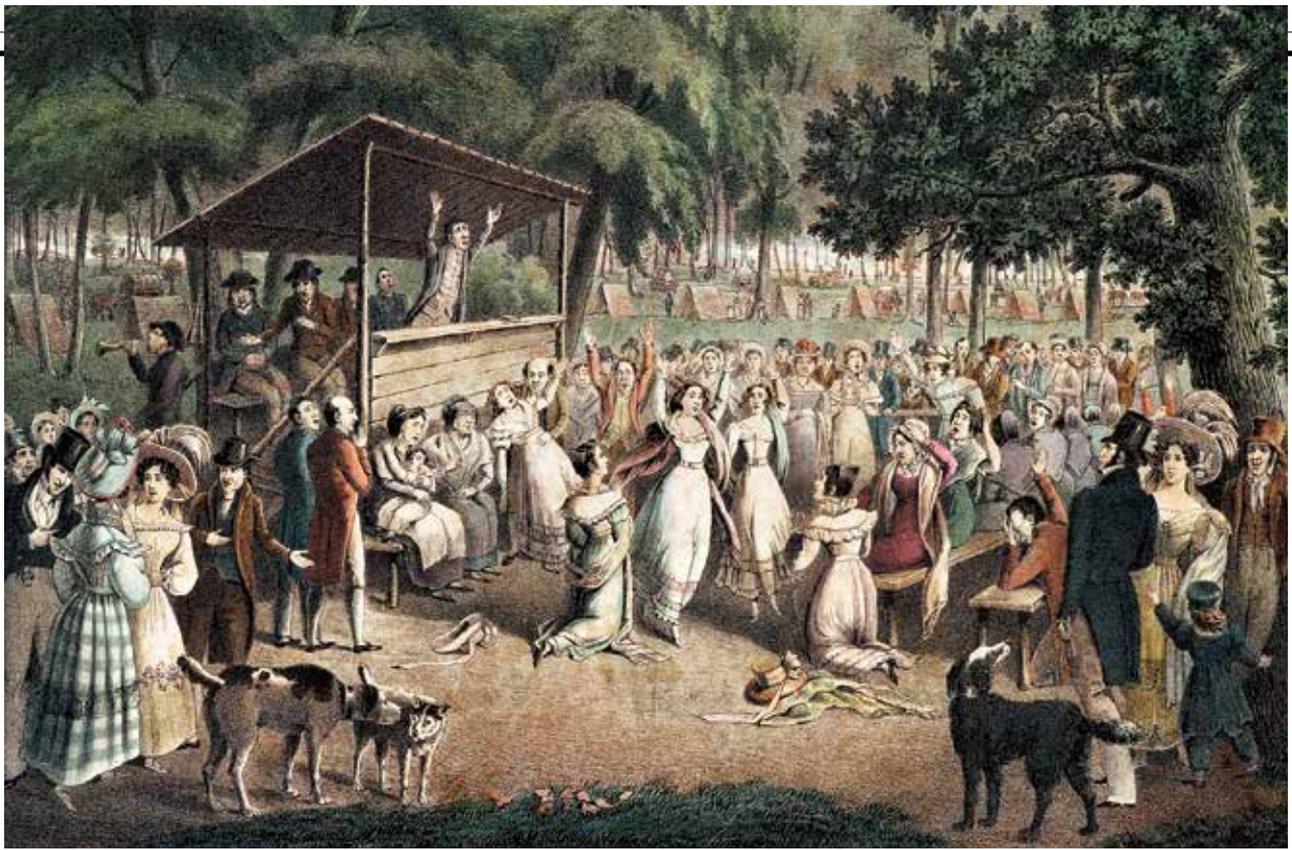
ALL JOIN IN In 2017 Reformed leaders joined Lutheran, Catholic, and Methodist thinkers in endorsing the Joint Declaration (Methodists had signed it in 2006).

Lutheran thinkers believe that this puts global South Christians much closer to the thoroughly medieval Luther than Luther would be to many “modern” Christians today. They see this as an opportunity to return to the ancient church’s wisdom around spiritual discernment, the operations of the demonic, and Eucharistic fellowship with “the great cloud of witnesses” who are close to us on earth.

EMBRACING THE GAPS

Most likely Lutherans will always be in a kind of gap among categories. As institutional Lutheranism continues to undergo global shifts and changes, it may occupy a kind of perpetual middle space that allows it to discern and embody connections between past and future, Protestant and Catholic, East and West, and modern and postmodern. These connections may also allow it to be a kind of restlessly generative force for God’s unity. We may at least pray so. ☒

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Restless and reforming

THE MERCERSBURG THEOLOGY PRESENTED REFORMED CHRISTIANS WITH A LINK TO THE PAST—IF THEY CHOSE TO USE IT

D. G. Hart

WHAT DOES IT MEAN to be a Reformed Protestant in the United States? A certain flower probably comes to mind—namely Calvinism’s five points of TULIP fame: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Today many people first meet Reformed Protestantism through the “New Calvinism” made popular by organizations like the Gospel Coalition, pastors like John Piper and Tim Keller, and movements like the YRR (“young, restless, and Reformed”), all of whom emphasize a clarity on these doctrinal points as a counter to creeping modernism in the church.

However many confessional Reformed Protestant communions feel that TULIP’s five points—a bumper sticker rendition of the 1619 Synod of Dort’s major declarations—fail to capture the depth and subtlety of what it means to be Reformed. In its zeal to recover the Reformation, New Calvinism has been criticized for stressing Dort’s declarative *doctrines* over the way that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Reformed churches *practiced* pastoral ministry and worship. Indeed

YOUNG, RESTLESS, AND REVIVALISTIC? Nevin criticized the techniques of revivalism—some of which are shown in this iconic image of a Second Great Awakening camp meeting.

when Reformed churches created a separate identity from Lutherans and Anglicans, they originally understood that Christianity involved much more than doctrines of original sin, justification by faith, or predestination. And if twenty-first-century Reformed churches in the United States have trouble differentiating themselves from the New Calvinism as they attempt to retrieve the past, that challenge actually first surfaced during the middle decades of the *nineteenth* century.

THE BENEVOLENT EMPIRE

During Charles Finney’s (1792–1875) famous revivals, a cooperative spirit arose that prompted a series of voluntary associations—everything from Sunday school and Bible societies to temperance and antislavery organizations. These movements blended Protestantism with

the spirit and demands of the new nation in ways that made the church of the Reformation look odd and impractical.

The Benevolent Empire—as the movement was called—now sought to make new converts through a modified Calvinism taught by those like Nathaniel Taylor at Yale Divinity School. Many felt this smoothed hard edges of the faith away in the service of evangelizing the new nation.

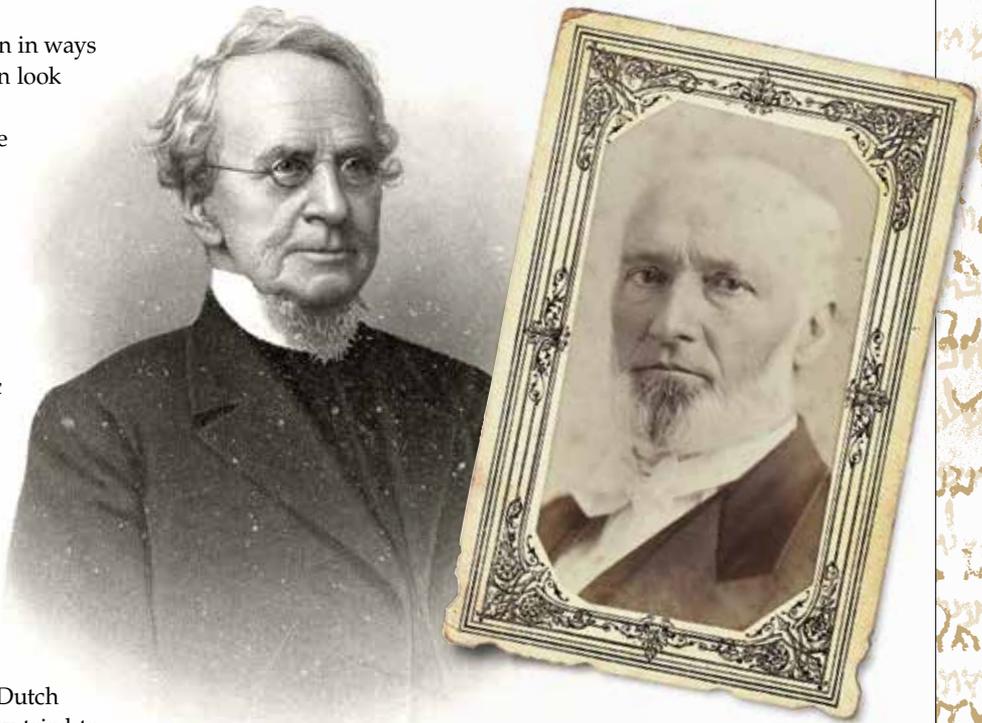
The cooperative and pragmatic Protestantism of Finney, Taylor, and others also wedded Christianity to the spread of Western civilization. They and other East Coast Protestants fully expected to take the faith (and its supporting institutions) to the frontier (and to foreign lands through missionaries) and so establish a Christian society.

Ethnic Protestants—especially Dutch and German immigrants—resisted. They tried to maintain Old World traditions and institutions even as church members assimilated as Americans. Many of these “hyphenated” Protestants held on to the confessions, church politics, and liturgies of Europe’s Protestant establishment.

Some Presbyterians of Scottish and Irish heritage, called “Old School” and already at home in North America for a century or so, resisted the Benevolent Empire in hopes of maintaining the teaching and practice of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. German Reformed, Dutch Reformed, and Old School Presbyterians, along with Lutherans, all represented an alternative to the evangelical Protestant mainstream that began to coalesce during the two decades before the Civil War.

Princeton Seminary’s Charles Hodge (1797–1898) and Benjamin Warfield (1851–1921) presented to the wider world an Old School Presbyterian defense of the convictions shaping the Westminster Confession. Some time later the Dutch American Calvinist tradition, centered around Calvin College, would produce scholars such as Nicholas Wolterstorff (b. 1932), Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932), and Richard Mouw (b. 1940)—all part of evangelical intellectual life since the 1970s. But fewer people are aware of the German Reformed tradition or the significant arguments in favor of church tradition made by John Williamson Nevin (1803–1886) and Philip Schaff (1819–1893).

German Reformed Protestantism took its cues from German-speaking Calvinists centered in the city of Heidelberg. As a consequence of religious wars in Europe and economic opportunity in North America, Swiss and German Protestants had begun in the 1700s



PARTNERS IN CRIME Above left: Nevin gained both fame and a heresy trial through his work with Schaff (above right), who came to the United States after a brief academic career in Germany.

to settle in Pennsylvania, a haven of both religious freedom and fertile soil. By the 1820s a small immigrant and rural church began to organize around denominational structures and schools. Mercersburg Seminary, founded in 1825, was the German Reformed Church’s institution for training pastors. Its leaders managed a coup in 1840 when they lured Nevin, a Scotch-Irishman and native of Pennsylvania, to leave Pittsburgh Seminary and the Presbyterian Church to teach theology and lead Mercersburg Seminary.

ABANDONING THE ANXIOUS BENCH

Part of what made Mercersburg appealing to Nevin was his own reading in contemporary German theology and philosophy, but he also had a growing dissatisfaction with what was happening to Anglo-American Protestantism. In 1843 he wrote *The Anxious Bench*, one of the most searching theological and psychological critiques of revivalism ever produced in the United States.

The critique directly attacked one of Finney’s most novel techniques: bringing potential converts to a bench at the front of the church to be prayed over (the origin of today’s altar call). Nevin accused Finney of abandoning the rhythms and ministry of historic Protestantism, writing at one point:



THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS *Left:* Schaff became most famous not at Mercersburg but at Union Seminary in New York.

STILL WORSHIPPING *Below:* The chapel at Franklin and Marshall College is still named after Nevin today.

for support in affirming the real presence of Christ (spiritually) in the Lord's Supper, but Hodge tended in the direction of Huldrych Zwingli's understanding of the sacrament as a memorial of Christ's death.

ENTER SCHAFF

Nevin soon received help from Swiss German historian Philip Schaff, who arrived in the United States in 1844. Schaff's strengths as a church historian were particularly useful for trying to overcome what the Mercersburg theologians regarded as a false understanding of the Reformation.

Instead of arguing that Protestantism stands for the triumph of reason over superstition or freedom of conscience over church tyranny, Schaff (and Nevin to a lesser degree) stressed the continuity between medieval and early modern European Christianity.

This also had the advantage of supporting several of Nevin's other contentions: that Puritanism was responsible for American Protestantism's rejection of liturgical forms and sacramental life, and that anti-Catholicism in the United States, which was increasing in the 1840s, relied on a misunderstanding



We are all more or less familiar with Christianity in this form. It has no faith in the Church as a Christian mystery, and shrinks from the acknowledgment of any saving virtue in Christ's Sacraments. It is of course constitutionally unliturgical; as it can see no meaning in the Church Year. It is not able to say the Creed without mental reservation. Yet it claims to be spiritual, beyond others; and studiously affects an exclusive right to the title *Evangelical!*

Nevin followed up his criticism with several essays that blamed the Puritans for losing sight of the sacraments and the corporate character of Christianity. This led him to study the Eucharistic theology of Europe's Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Eventually Nevin's argument provoked a lengthy and learned dispute with Charles Hodge over the nature of the Lord's Supper. The Mercersburg theologian looked to Calvin

of the Reformation.

Most influentially the Mercersburg Theology was guided by an understanding of the Incarnation that linked the doctrine of Christ to ecclesiology and sacramental theology. Nevin and Schaff thought that a proper appreciation for Christ's significance would lead to a recognition of the church as Christ's body and the sacraments as embodiments of his ongoing salvation of his people—and, perhaps, to abandoning techniques such as the anxious bench. This was the German Reformed equivalent of the High Church movement that blossomed within the Church of England at roughly the same time (see "Taking the long view," p. 15).

Nevin and Schaff had almost a decade of fruitful collaboration before their labors ran aground. Nevin so emphasized an incarnational understanding of the church as Christ's body that around 1852 he considered

UNION SEMINARY 1910—AMERICAN GUILD OF ORGANISTS, NEW YORK CHAPTER
NEVIN CHAPEL—PHOTO COURTESY OF FRANKLIN AND MARSHALL COLLEGE

becoming Roman Catholic. At roughly the same time, Schaff left Mercersburg to join the faculty at Union Seminary in New York City.

Meanwhile their efforts to put Mercersburg's teaching into the German Reformed Church's liturgy launched an almost two-decades-long controversy. It pitted those who wanted a worship service compatible with American revivalist sensibilities against others who sought to retrieve historic forms of Christian worship that used traditional written prayers and encouraged frequent Eucharist.

Nevin continued to serve the denomination and was a part of the committee on liturgical revision. He kept a low profile otherwise. He continued to teach at the seminary, which relocated to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and at Franklin and Marshall College, a school of the German Reformed Church in Lancaster. Schaff in contrast became Presbyterian and established himself as the leading church historian in the United States through multivolume textbooks, anthologies, and encyclopedias.

One anthology, *The Creeds of Christendom* (1876), introduced many classic confessions of faith to a nineteenth-century audience. In addition to Schaff's path-breaking scholarly activity (he founded the American Society of Church History, still going strong), he also became a leader in Protestant ecumenism in both the United States and Europe.

Even so Mercersburg's movement remained largely an isolated phenomenon that depended on a small ethnic denomination's networks for distribution. In the end



WHO IS OLD SCHOOL? While many modern Reformed movements for renewal center around figures like Timothy Keller (*above*) and John Piper (*left*), others look back to the work of Mercersburg.



upon German theological and philosophical developments.

At the same time, the writings of Nevin (and to a lesser extent Schaff) have periodically inspired American Protestants—Reformed and otherwise—who are frustrated by the individu-

alistic, parachurch-driven, and experiential qualities of “born-again” evangelical Protestantism to look for alternatives.

Although the answers that Mercersburg supplied have many quirks and shortcomings, Nevin's and Schaff's recognition of the differences between modern evangelicalism and the Reformation has often prompted their students to reflect on the character of Protestantism at its origins and its rejection of Roman Catholicism.

Especially for those Protestants who look to the confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a substantial and yet succinct summary of orthodox teaching, who underscore the importance of ordination and church oversight, and who engage in sober and reverent worship, Mercersburg has often been a fruitful path for exploring tensions between evangelical and confessional Protestantism. ■

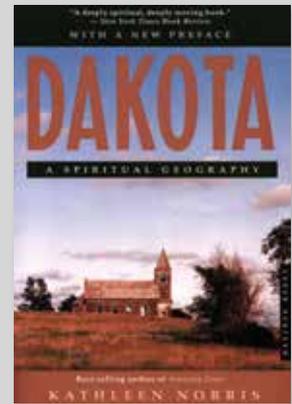
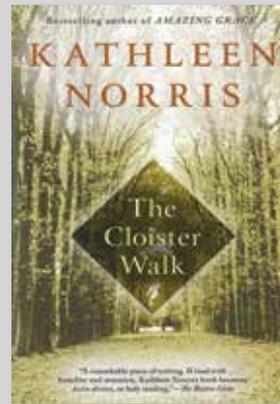
May this repository of creeds and confessions promote a better understanding among the Churches of Christ. The divisions of Christendom bring to light the various aspects and phases of revealed truth, and will be overruled at last for a deeper and richer harmony, of which Christ is the key-note. In him and by him all problems of theology and history will be solved. The nearer believers of different creeds approach the Christological centre, the better they will understand and love each other.—Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (1876)

its most substantial contribution may be the liturgy that the German Reformed Church adopted in 1887 (a compromise that allowed for freedom while also including samples of older forms), as well as its provoking a body of theological reflection in the United States that drew

D. G. Hart is distinguished associate professor of history at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan. He is the author or editor of over 15 books including Calvinism: A History and John Williamson Nevin: High-Church Calvinist.



A POET AMONG MONKS Norris (*left*) thought she would make her name as a poet. Instead her greatest legacy came from her spiritual memoirs (*below*).



From Manhattan to the monastery

In 1974 emerging poet Kathleen Norris (b. 1947) embarked on a journey that surprised even herself. The cosmopolitan 27-year-old—born in Washington, DC, raised in Hawaii, and educated in Vermont—gave up working for the Academy of American Poets and moved from Manhattan to Lemmon, South Dakota, with her new husband, David Dwyer, also a poet. Her maternal grandparents had passed away, and someone needed to tend their home. The move set in motion Norris's transformation into a beloved spiritual writer as she discovered the riches of Christian tradition.

The couple's Manhattan friends thought the two of them had lost their minds when they moved to a town of 1,600 people. They anticipated staying only a few years while her mother (still in Hawaii) decided what to do with the house. Instead they stayed a few decades.

Dwyer struggled with severe clinical depression that made him suicidal and once led him to disappear for days. (The policeman who found him told Norris, "Ma'am, your husband was so *depressed*, I never saw a man so depressed as that.") Though raised and confirmed in the United Church of Christ, Norris had no real commitment to it; interacting with her fundamentalist paternal grandmother had distanced her from the church. But as she tried to cope with Dwyer's illness, she began to grow closer to the small country Presbyterian church where her maternal grandparents had been active.

Eventually she was asked to fill in as a preacher by someone who told her, "You're a writer, you can preach." She also began visiting a local Benedictine monastery:

There I was in western South Dakota, and there was this monastery 90 miles away that was offering some talks and lectures and music concerts and things like that, and out there those are hard

to come by. . . . I stumbled into Morning Prayer. . . . I didn't even know what the monks were reciting. But they were reciting the psalms.

The experience of hearing these ancient texts as living prayer was transforming. In 1986 she became an oblate of that monastery.

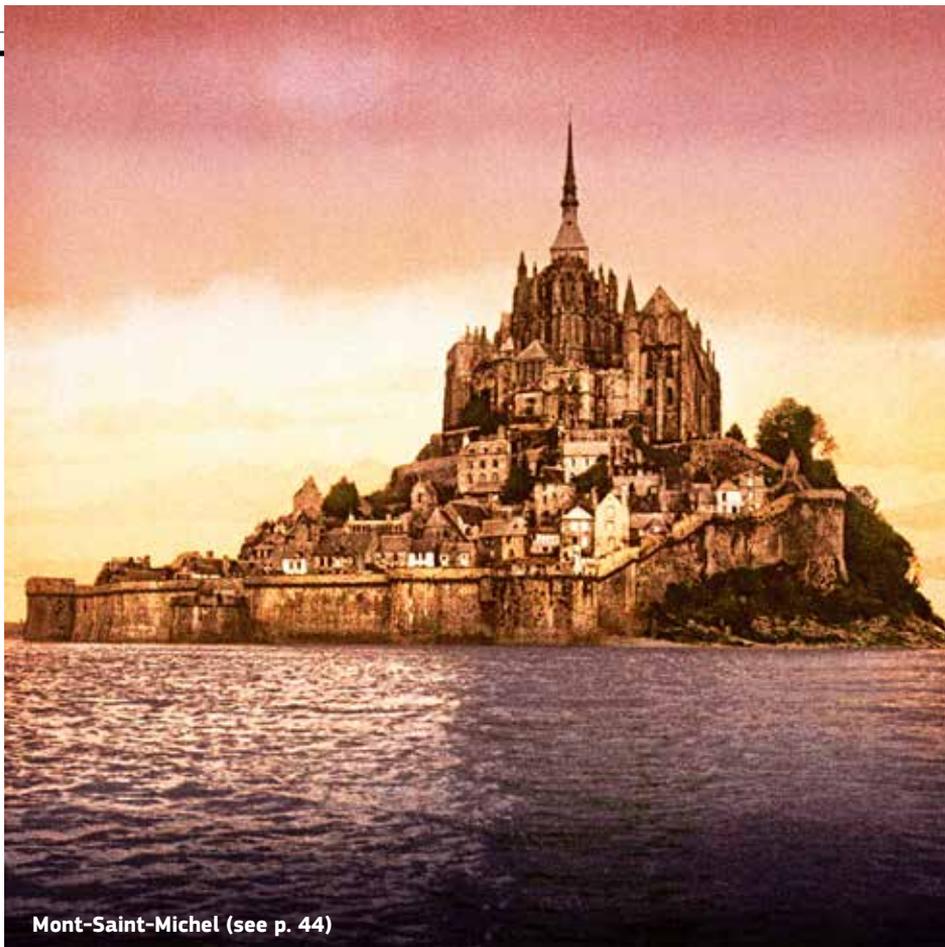
Norris started to write short essays relating Christian faith to everyday life, eventually collected in *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (1993). The original printing called for only 2,500 copies, but to everyone's surprise the book became a *New York Times* bestseller. Norris once commented that her small church community cared little about her literary pursuits except for the time she told her pastor she had finally sold a poem to the *New Yorker*. He announced it as one of the "joys of the church" on Sunday morning.

Norris's follow-up memoir about life as an oblate, *The Cloister Walk* (1996), also unexpectedly topped best-seller lists. Norris, then in her fifties, suddenly found herself on book tours introducing the church's traditions of prayer to thousands. Over the next decade, she would write a commentary on the Psalms, release Christian books for adults (and one for children) plus several books of religious poetry, and publish a memoir of her early life. Her writing helped explain the depth and relevance of Christianity to a generation of spiritual seekers.

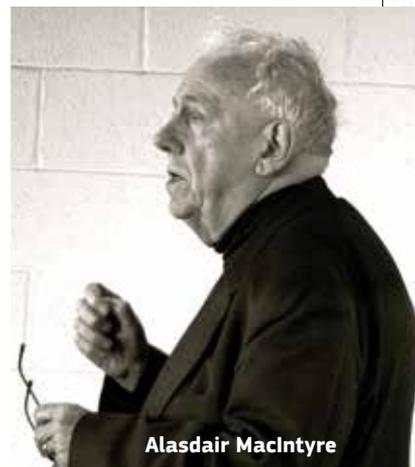
Dwyer died in 2003 after a long illness, and the 71-year-old Norris now lives mostly in Hawaii, spending only the summers in Lemmon. She told an interviewer in 2015:

In a funny way, I have a monastic life there in Honolulu. I spend a lot of time alone in my apartment or walking. In a way, it's a bit like my monastery. . . . I have a lot of solitude there, though I miss the silence of the Great Plains. But I think you can find your monastic cell, your commitment to prayer wherever you are.

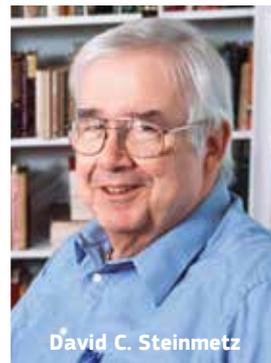
—Jennifer Woodruff Tait



Mont-Saint-Michel (see p. 44)



Alasdair MacIntyre



David C. Steinmetz

“We’re not done with virtue yet”

MANY DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO RECOVER FROM MODERN AMNESIA

Jennifer A. Boardman

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE (B. 1929)

Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, born in Glasgow, has taught at a number of universities in the United Kingdom and the United States. He began his career as a Marxist. In his fifties, as he sought to convince his students of the errors of the Thomist thought predominant among many Roman Catholics (see “Going behind Aquinas,” pp. 28–31), he instead became convinced of Thomism himself, adopted Aquinas’s Aristotelian ethical approach, and converted to Catholicism.

He now works within what he calls an “Augustinian Thomist approach to moral philosophy” based on Aquinas’s premise that truth is truth no matter its source, and he argues this is the best approach to combating Western individualism and materialism.

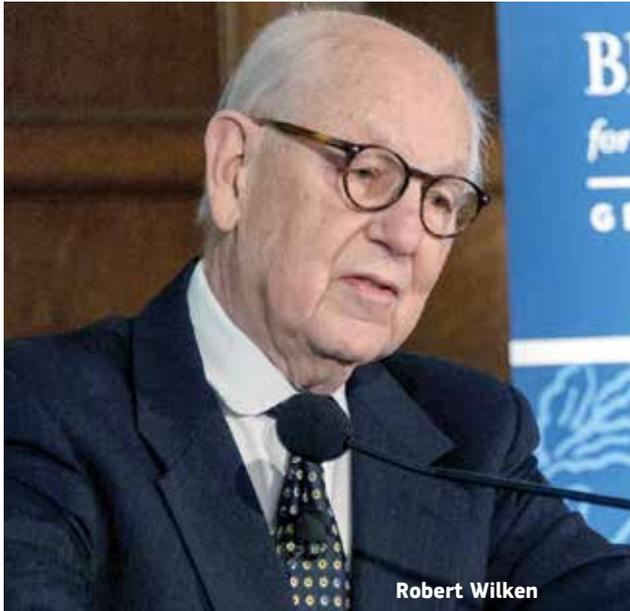
NO NEW GOSPEL “God doesn’t intend to mold the church in your image, you’ll be relieved to know, but in the image of the crucified and risen Christ.” (David C. Steinmetz)

In his most famous book, *After Virtue* (1981), MacIntyre advocated for smaller communities that can maintain their practices and morals in tight-knit groups to prevent succumbing to the moral ills of gross individualism:

What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.

MacIntyre influenced a number of twentieth- and twenty-first-century renewal movements, especially

MONT-SAINT-MICHEL—WIKIMEDIA
ALASDAIR MACINTYRE—FLICKR (UPLOADED BY SEAN)
DAVID STEINMETZ—COURTESY OF DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL



Robert Wilken

DEEP AND WIDE “The older Christian traditions provide depth, because they are rooted in classical Christian doctrine, and they offer breadth, because they have nurtured outstanding examples of faithful Christian thinking.” (Mark Noll)

its attention on what the original authors meant, the historical-critical method had made Scripture unusable for the church and sidelined the question of truth, Steinmetz believed. Instead exegetes should consider the “fourfold sense” of interpretation used by the early church. He remarked in that article:

How was a French parish priest in 1150 to understand Psalm 137? . . . The priest lives in Concale, not Babylon, has no personal quarrel with Edomites, cherishes no ambitions to visit Jerusalem (though he might fancy a holiday in Paris), and is expressly forbidden by Jesus to avenge himself on his enemies. . . . Unless Psalm 137 has more than one possible meaning, it cannot be used as a prayer

by the church. . . . “Until the historical-critical method becomes critical of its own theoretical foundations . . . it will remain restricted—as it deserves to be—to the guild and the academy, where the question of truth can endlessly be deferred.” Many younger scholars influenced by Steinmetz have begun to bring attention to exegesis as practiced by the church fathers into both church and academy.



Mark Noll



William Abraham

ROBERT WILKEN (B. 1936)

Professor of early Christian history at the University of Virginia, Robert Wilken considers the early church to be the true foundation of a living faith. In the introduction of his influential book, *The Spirit*

through *After Virtue* and his other popular book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988).

DAVID STEINMETZ (1936–2015)

David Steinmetz was an American historian of late medieval and early modern Christianity. A United Methodist, he spent most of his career teaching at Duke Divinity School. Steinmetz was passionate about proper exegesis. He wasn’t interested in viewing leaders of the Reformation through a postmodern context or extracting them from their historical settings.

While concerned for the recovery of tradition in general, he set a particular renewal agenda in his landmark article, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis” (1980). There he analyzed the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation that had developed in the nineteenth century. By focusing all

of *Early Christian Thought* (2003), Wilken noted: “Though long dead, the church fathers maintain their ground.”

What was the ultimate aim of the early church’s devotional practices, daily psalm recitations, celebration of the Eucharist, and theological arguments?, Wilken wondered. A deep and abiding love for Christ and his church motivated early Christians—in all their liturgical and doctrinal endeavors. According to Wilken to look back to the early church’s thought and practice is to look forward to a more dedicated, vibrant, loving church. His writing influenced Rod Dreher (see p. 44), among others, especially through this statement:

It is less urgent to convince the alternative culture in which we live of the truth of Christ than it is for the church to tell itself its own story and to nurture its own life, the culture of the city of God, the Christian republic.

MARK NOLL (B. 1946)

Mark Noll is a historian specializing in the history of Christianity in the United States and Canada, and is currently research professor of history at Regent College. Noll's ground-breaking book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994), discusses anti-intellectualism within American evangelicalism. *TIME* named him one of America's 25 most influential evangelicals. He has also taught at Wheaton (where he cofounded the now-defunct Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals) and Notre Dame. Ten years after *Scandal's* publication, Noll revisited his thesis and admitted he has new hope for American evangelicalism, especially ecumenically:

While evangelicals offer Catholics eagerness, commitment, and an ability to negotiate in a culture of intellectual consumerism, Catholics offer evangelicals a sense of tradition and centuries of reflection on the bearing of sacramentality on all existence.

Noll remains a Presbyterian, though, and remains committed to "the classical Protestantism of the Reformation . . . especially accounts of sin, grace, and salvation." But he maintains that modern American evangelicals need to hold on to the traditions and theology of the early church: "Tradition without life might be barely Christian, but life without tradition is barely coherent."

WILLIAM J. ABRAHAM (B. 1947)

William J. Abraham is a Northern Irish theologian, philosopher, United Methodist pastor, and a professor at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Texas. Well known for challenging progressive views within his denomination, Abraham describes his views most fully in *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (1998).

Years ago when Abraham first arrived in the United States, he began attending the American church services of his Methodist denomination. Before long he recognized a deep apathy toward orthodox Christian beliefs among his new friends. Even though many were religious churchgoers, he reported that they rejected the Trinity and the Incarnation. As a result they were "not only intellectually thin but spiritually hopeless."

Abraham supports the in-depth study of early church doctrine to mitigate that hopelessness wrought by unorthodox theology:

If I have an experience of God, I'd like to know who this God is. And all that deep Christian doctrine does is begin to articulate who the God is that you've met in the Gospel and in your own experience.

TRANSFORMED, NOT COOL "There's nothing Christians can do to appear 'cool' to the postmodern crowd, and trying to do so only makes us look foolish. . . . A community of transformed believers—radiant, humble, and holy—will have more impact than any smiley-face ad campaign, no matter what the culture." (Frederica Mathewes-Green)



Scott Hahn



Frederica Mathewes-Green

FREDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN (B. 1952)

Frederica Mathewes-Green is an Eastern Orthodox author, speaker, and pro-life advocate. She rejected Christianity as a teen but became an Episcopalian as a young married woman. In 1993 she and her Episcopal priest husband, Gregory, converted to Orthodoxy. He became an Orthodox priest, and some of their parishioners also converted, beginning Holy Cross Orthodox Parish in Maryland. Orthodoxy attracted them, she said, because it "transcended geography and century; multiple generations of use in multiple tongues had given it the stone washed quality of that which endures." Mathewes-Green has written a number of devotional books; one of the most well known, *The Open Door* (2003), attempts to introduce Westerners to icons in Orthodox thought. For the Orthodox, she writes, icons are more than pictures:

. . . we call them "windows into heaven." We pray through them, so to speak, not to wood and paint but to [the] Lord pictured beyond. Because they bear him to us we treasure them, like we would a photo of a loved one.

In ancient and medieval Christendom, she wrote, preliterate people needed to see an image of Christ to engrave "spiritual truths on their hearts."

SCOTT HAHN (B. 1957)

Scott Hahn is a Roman Catholic professor of biblical theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville (Ohio). Ordained as a Presbyterian, Hahn converted to Catholicism in 1986; like Mathewes-Green and others

SCOTT HAHN—AMERICA MAGAZINE/PHOTO BY SEAN SALAI, S.J.
FREDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN—THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN BY JOGELYN MATHEWES



Rod Dreher

we've discussed, he is among those recent Protestants who became Catholic or Orthodox because of their interest in church tradition. He has written over 20 books, of which the most famous is probably *Rome Sweet Home* (1993), and he runs the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology with his wife, Kimberly (b. 1957), to promote biblical literacy among Catholic laypeople. Hahn's primary academic work concerns how we read the Bible, asserting:

The Bible and the liturgy were made for one another. . . . The Scriptures were intended to sweep the worshiper into their action—"as if the passage had been read on his account."

Hahn thinks that when believers read the Scriptures together, they take part in profound corporate transformation. He has worked to help Catholics reconnect Scripture to the liturgy.

ROD DREHER (B. 1967)

Rod Dreher is a senior editor and writer at the *American Conservative* and an Eastern Orthodox Christian (after previously being both Methodist and Catholic). He championed the "Benedict Option" in his 2017 book of the same name, choosing Benedictine monastery Mont-Saint-Michel for the book cover. In this model Christians should reject Western fragmentation and individualism by living in close-knit, intentional Christian communities. Instead of seeing his model as irresponsible separation from the world, Dreher views it as a very public discipleship, "itself an indirect form of evangelism."

Dreher published his book after being influenced by the life of fifth-century monastic Benedict of Nursia (whose biography he read in MacIntyre's *After Virtue*). Dreher believes modern American Christianity subscribes to what sociologist Christian Smith called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism: God is there only if we need help, and our primary goal is to be happy. He

OLD ISLAND "We are only trying to build a Christian way of life that stands as an island of sanctity and stability amid the high tide of liquid modernity." (Rod Dreher)

RADICAL JESUS "We're crazy in the way that Jesus was crazy. I think that's radical." (Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove)

asserts that American Christians need to recommit themselves to Christ's teachings and reject the American Dream: "Pagans converted to the early church not simply because of the words the first Christians spoke, but because of the witness of the kinds of lives they lived. It has to be that way with us too."



Shane Claiborne

**SHANE CLAIBORNE (B. 1975)
JONATHAN WILSON-HARTGROVE
(B. 1980)**

Shane Claiborne is the founder of the communal living community the Simple Way, which began in 1995 in Claiborne's Philadelphia neighborhood. After the local Catholic archdiocese warned homeless families to leave an abandoned cathedral, Claiborne looked to the book of Acts for answers, concluding:

All these believers were together and shared everything they had. . . . What we learn from the

monastic tradition is that it begins with the single-minded pursuit of God and neighbor.

The Simple Way grew from one house into a number of properties on the same block. There families share their homes and gardens, eat and pray together, "and try to live as one big family." Claiborne also leads the organization Red Letter Christians.

A few years later, in 2003, divinity students Jonathan and Leah Wilson-Hartgrove founded the Rutba House in Durham, North Carolina. There they live in a predominately black neighborhood to serve the poor, invite people in need to live with them, and listen to the stories of the marginalized. Today the organization has developed into the nonprofit School for Conversion, and Jonathan also ministers at a historically black Baptist church.

Jonathan believes that the Bible supports New Monasticism's rejection of "suburban culture—[where] people live on a cul-de-sac, get in their cars and drive to work . . . drive somewhere else to go to church." Claiborne also believes that "the patterns of this world, when it comes to suburbia, are built around things that are very counter-cultural to the gospel . . . the very call of Jesus is to move closer to suffering, not away from it."☒

Jennifer A. Boardman is a freelance writer and editor. She holds a master of theological studies from Bethel Seminary with a concentration in Christian history.

ROD DREHER—MAX BECHERER / THE WASHINGTON POST
SHANE CLAIBORNE—SHANECLAIBORNE.COM

Renewals and revivals

Here are some other more recent organizations that have attempted to be forces of renewal and Christian unity while maintaining a commitment to historic orthodoxy.

In 1977 United Methodist professor Albert Outler (1908–1989) and evangelist Edmund Robb Jr. (1926–2004), both alarmed by their declining denomination, founded **A Foundation for Theological Education** as an attempt to return United Methodism to a focus on classical Christian orthodoxy and Wesleyan thought. It funds evangelical Methodists to complete doctoral work and also publishes the magazine *Catalyst*. Alumni of the program have become professors at colleges and seminaries, chaplains, pastors, and in one case a bishop.

For some decades now, conservative Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox have all read *Touchstone*, a magazine founded in 1986 that describes itself as “conservative in doctrine and eclectic in content” and intentionally seeks out readers who wish to unite in an ecumenical conversation shaped by commitment to the Bible and the ancient creeds.

The magazine is published by the **Fellowship of St. James**, “founded in 1976 to promote fidelity to Jesus Christ, encourage greater Christian unity, and defend traditional Christian doctrines and moral teachings.” FSJ also publishes devotional materials and the journal *Salvo*.

POLITICS, MONKS, AND DOCTRINE

In 1989, shortly before converting to Catholicism, Lutheran pastor Richard John Neuhaus founded the **Institute on Religion and Public Life**, which describes itself as “an interreligious, nonpartisan research and educational” nonprofit organization. It strives to influence the culture in ways that derive from ideas expressed in Neuhaus’s 1984 book, *The Naked Public Square*.

The IRPL is best known for the journal *First Things*, but it is also the structural home for the **Evangelicals and Catholics Together** project (see “25 years of talking together,” p. 32).

Concerned about historic spiritual disciplines but also supporting the ordination of women to the priesthood, a group of English priests founded the **Society of Catholic Priests** in 1994 to be a



worldwide Anglican fellowship of priests, deacons, monks, and nuns. Members agree to follow a rule of life centered on the Eucharist, prayer, confession, and regular meetings with a spiritual director.

The term “**New Monasticism**” has been applied to a number of Protestant movements since the 1970s that attempt to live in intentional community and open the riches of the contemplative life to people living in the world (see p. 44).

In the United States, the “new monastic” term is most often associated with Shane Claiborne, with Jonathan R. Wilson (b. 1951)—author of *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World* (1998)—and his daughter and son-in-law Jonathan and Leah Wilson-Hartgrove and, most recently, with the **Missional Wisdom Foundation** run by Elaine Heath (b. 1954), a United Methodist pastor and divinity school professor. In 2004 a voluntary rule for some of these groups called “12 Marks of the New Monasticism” was drawn up. It emphasizes hospitality, peacemaking, contemplation, and solidarity with the poor.

In 2005 pastors Tim Keller (b. 1950) and D. A. Carson (b. 1946) founded the **Gospel Coalition**, a fellowship of churches “banding together to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel.” It is probably most known today through its high-profile website. TGC explicitly rejects modernism, but it also rejects the “monastic retreats into ritual, liturgy, and sacrament” it sees as characteristic of many other renewal movements we’ve discussed here. —Jennifer Woodruff Tait



A church of the ages?

WE ASKED SOME PASTORS AND PROFESSORS TO REFLECT ON WHAT IT MEANS TO RECOVER FROM MODERN AMNESIA AND HOW THE ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL FAITH CAN INFORM THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

AN ANCIENT INCENSE

Jason Byassee is Butler Professor of Homiletics and Biblical Hermeneutics at Vancouver School of Theology, a United Methodist minister, and the author of numerous books including Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine.

WE ALL KNOW stories of folks walking away from faith. I find it much more interesting to ask why anyone stays. I heard one such story of a friend of a friend who stayed Christian only because of the incense. He had rejected all the ideas and practices, but the smell kept him coming back for reasons he could not explain and actually found laughable.

The psalmist would not laugh. "Let my prayer be to you as incense," David prayed (Psalm 141:2). This is of course, *just* a metaphor. But evangelicals of all people should know that nothing is *just* anything. Think of your visceral reaction when someone claims the Resurrection is *just* a metaphor. Ancient Israelites knew how to pray by lighting candles and watching the light glow and the

LIGHT ONE CANDLE What place do physical acts have in Christian practice?

smoke rise, and by smelling the incense. This is not just a later layer of tradition that Protestants shucked off. It is biblical. And in this man's case, it was evangelical. It drew him to Jesus through the church.

For five centuries Catholic and Protestant Christians have each defined themselves partly by *not* being the other. To belong to the Church of Rome was to be on the fast lane to the place where horned people carry three-pronged spears, Protestants thought; vice-versa from Rome's perspective. At some point that stopped being true. Maybe it came from Vatican II bringing Catholic liturgy into the vernacular; from Mary placed on the side and Christ's cross at the center of Catholic worship space; and from the personal heroism of John Paul II. This shift is epochal.

Robert Webber coined a wonderful description when he titled his book *Evangelicals on the Canterbury*

Trail. He had in mind folks who join the Anglican Communion, but evangelicals also take up historic practices without changing churches. One multisite megachurch in Vancouver celebrates Communion weekly in several locations. Others practice centering prayer or *lectio divina* (a Benedictine practice of reading and meditating on Scripture), or host Renovaré events. Few are accused of doing something “bad.” They’re not even accused of being not-evangelical. (In our consumerist age, they’re probably thought of as offering an alternative market choice, unfortunately.)

We can think of ancient practices as ways to advance to higher spiritual realms, but that is gnostic, elitist nonsense.

I would prefer these practices be narrated as learning from tradition something forgotten from Scripture. Evangelicals are Bible people first and foremost and should never apologize for that. Tradition can remind us of things forgotten or neglected, however.

I learned anew how to pray from Trappist monks. They commit to poverty, chastity, and obedience (and claim obedience is the hardest). They chant Psalms seven times a day, as the psalmist says (119:164). They take this so literally they arrange working, sleeping, and eating to be in church seven times a day (eight if you count the Eucharist). This is no onerous duty; it is actually full freedom. I’ve never been around happier people. They taught me again to love the Bible. Evangelicals first taught me that. But we forget quickly.

I asked a monk once which saints were buried under their altar. He immediately knew what I meant. Revelation 6:9–11 speaks of saints under the altar praying, patiently waiting for Christ’s kingdom and their vindication. So Catholic altars have the relics of saints under them. This monk couldn’t remember who! It hardly mattered. As we pray we join with the prayers of countless people we cannot see with our physical eyes. There are macabre versions of this relic practice that strike me as more pagan than Christian. But this monastery was simply taking the Bible more literally than perhaps the Bible is asking to be taken. That is no sin.

I was at the monastery once on August 6, the traditional feast of the Transfiguration for Western Christians. It is also the day of the Hiroshima bombing that ended World War II but killed tens of thousands of civilians. A monk prayed that day for those “transfigured this day at Hiroshima.” And suddenly an image of unimaginable grace eclipsed an image of unspeakable horror. That’s the sort of creativity in prayer that comes from keeping a calendar and praying for the world for a living.

I hope evangelicals keep learning from practices of more liturgical communities and vice-versa. For one



CAN WE ALL BE ONE? Women pray together at an interdenominational conference in the United States.

day we will all be one. And maybe then the world will believe (John 17:21).

A MEDIEVAL RETRIEVAL

Chris Armstrong is senior editor of Christian History and the author of Medieval Wisdom for Modern Christians and Patron Saints for Postmoderns.

WHILE I APPLAUD the church’s retrieval of ancient practices, I find many Protestants are held back from a *medieval* retrieval by “black hole historiography”—the assumption that, sometime around Constantine, the church fell away entirely from truth, leaving the medieval period to struggle in spiritual darkness until the Reformation. This is particularly incongruous when we understand that Luther and Calvin were thoroughly medieval in many ways. Their favorite theologians included Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, and they drew deeply on medieval mysticism, the medieval concern for truth, and much else of that era.

Though recent works have been rehabilitating the first four to six centuries of the church, the medieval period has been left in the black hole—its riches largely inaccessible to modern Protestants. And even when accessed, the appropriation is often limited to individual practice and marked by a consumerist tone (pick one “spiritual discipline” from column A, one from column B, and enjoy them in the privacy of your prayer closet or small group).

I believe that the medieval church is our next frontier. It certainly contains its share of “land mines” to identify and skirt. But medieval faith also offers, for pilgrims lost in modern mazes, well-marked pathways “onward and upward” to long-lost vistas of spiritual vitality. What will the modern pilgrim see?



First, those who still assume that “tradition” must inherently contradict Scripture will discover how medieval thinkers revered tradition *in harmony with* Scripture.

Second, those who sense that our world reflects God’s glory will find in medieval scholasticism’s theologically informed, intellectually voracious, and disciplined pursuit of the liberal arts the original vision of the university—now lost to secularization. They can thereby recover reason, not as an independent human power, but rather as God’s highest earthly gift to humanity.

Third, those misled by “situation ethics” devoid of any standard or consensus will rejoice in medieval traditions that ground moral action in precise, acute, and biblically faithful understandings of virtue and vice.

Fourth, those mired in the modern dismissal of the material world as spiritually irrelevant, or the modern

WHAT DO WE RENEW? From the beauty of illuminated prayer books (like this 15th-c. book of hours, *above*) to the central role of the Eucharist (recalled at *left*), the medieval world also offers recovery from modern amnesia.

materialism that makes idols of material goods, will rediscover older sacramental ways that find the Creator everywhere in Creation.

Fifth, those whose walk with God has begun to feel routine and lifeless will draw new life from a devotional tradition that dwelt lovingly both in the passion of the Song of Songs and in the compassion of Christ on the cross. Our devotions can once again engage our imaginations and our whole hearts, as we find new sweetness in the old stories of Scripture.

Sixth, those of us thwarted again and again in our walk with God by the sheer cussedness of fallen desires and habits will find in medieval ascetic and monastic traditions a way of living faithfully, shared too by such lay movements as the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life (see *CH* issue #127).

Finally, if our faith has begun to feel distant from our daily lives, we will discover medieval Christians’ wonder at the Incarnation: God walking with us in our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and civic spaces.

A FEAST FOR TODAY

Greg Peters is an associate professor in the Torrey Honors Institute at Biola University and ordained in the Anglican tradition. His books include The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary

HOW SHOULD WE SEEK GOD? Flowers left near an altar in the Vatican link present and past (at *right*); Trappists pray in Bardstown, Kentucky (*below*).

Spirituality *and* Reforming the Monastery: Protestant Theologies of the Religious Life.

AS IS OBVIOUS from this issue of *Christian History*, a movement is ongoing to recover the theology and practices of ancient forms of Christianity. The first four centuries are often privileged and sometimes even misappropriated by a misunderstanding that something pure and pristine about the early church makes it especially important to recover. What if we went further forward?

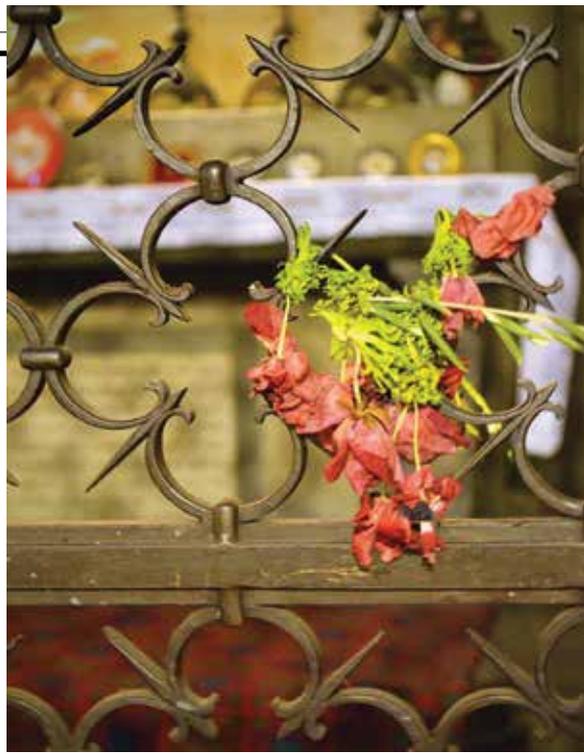
Without a doubt the frequent celebration of the Mass centered the worship life of medieval Christians. Many other spiritual practices from the medieval church could be commended to believers today, but none should displace the importance given to the Eucharist. In the words of historian Eamon Duffy, “The liturgy lay at the heart of medieval religion, and the Mass lay at the heart of the liturgy.” For Christians in the Middle Ages, the Mass was the sacred action that reenacted Jesus Christ’s self-giving on the hill of Calvary.

Nonetheless by the high and late Middle Ages, it was uncommon for believers to partake of the Eucharist. Most only did so at High Mass on Easter Sunday, though everyone sought to receive final Communion, the so-called *viaticum* (food for the way), on their deathbeds. Instead the focal point and whole reason to attend a Mass became to see the elevated Host. By the end of the twelfth century, the priest at the altar had begun to elevate the host for all to see just after the consecration (the words of institution—“This is my body”).

In time the ringing of a bell accompanied this action so that those present would abandon their private prayers to look up. This was necessary because much of what the priest said was inaudible or in Latin. In some parishes more than one Mass would be said at the same time. Thomas Cranmer later said that worshipers would “run from their seats to the altar, and from altar to altar . . . peeping, tooting, and gazing at that thing which the priest held up in his hands.”

Most modern Protestant Christians would reject this theology, including infrequent reception and the practice of only gazing at the Host. But we could learn from the Middle Ages to celebrate the Holy Eucharist frequently. It unites a congregation around one central ritual act that itself is meant to bring unity to the people of God.

Holy Communion done well involves both the ordained leadership of the parish and the gathered



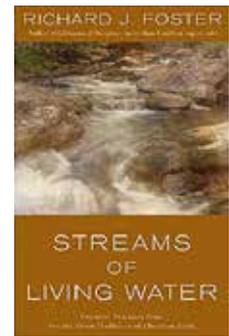
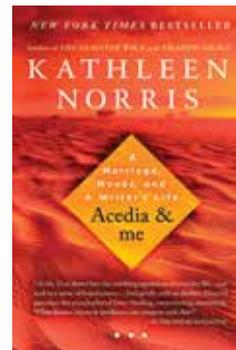
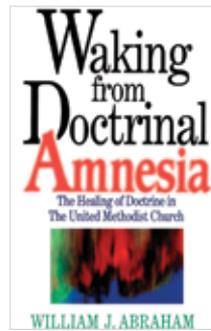
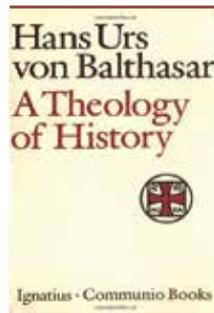
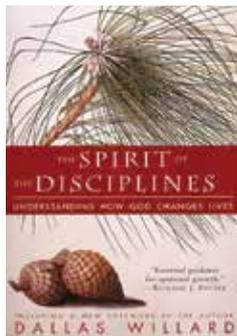
congregation. In my Anglican tradition, the priest says much of the Eucharistic service. Yet at the end of the consecration, the congregation adds their own “Amen,” affirming the action done on their behalf and showing that they too are acting out of the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The bread and the wine are not just for each person but for the church.

By making the Eucharist its central act of worship, the medieval church gave the preaching of the Word of God a role that supported this central act. This does not diminish the importance of God’s Word in the life of the church nor does it radically change what had been done in the earliest Christian centuries. What *is* clear is that by the high Middle Ages, the sermons supported the Holy Eucharist and were shorter because of it. (It is true that many parish priests were not competent to preach inspiring sermons—although periodic efforts attempted to reform this.)

For medieval Christians everything else (fasting, prayer, Bible study) flowed from or led to the celebration of Holy Communion. Church life began and ended with the Holy Eucharist. Perhaps this is what churches today must learn most from their medieval Christian forebears. Therefore let us keep the feast. ☒

Recommended resources

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CH EDITORIAL STAFF AND THIS ISSUE'S AUTHORS



BOOKS

Given the period of recent history this issue covers, we suggest you start with the primary sources—some of our featured writers' most famous works, addressed to modern people just like us. *Note: As always, CH does not endorse every idea in these books, but offers them as a beginning spot for further study.*

Theology: Thomas Oden, *After Modernity, What?* (1992), *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy* (2003), *Turning Around the Mainline* (2006); Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (1988), *The Divine Conspiracy* (1998), and *The Great Omission* (2006); Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (1984) and *The Mystical Body* (English translation of *Corpus Mysticum*, 2006); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (1994); Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Faith and Theology* (1968); Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition* (1964), *Tradition and Traditions* (1966), *True and False Reform in the Church* (2010); Timothy George and Thomas G. Guarino, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together at Twenty* (2015); John Williamson Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (1843) and *The Mystical Presence* (1846); Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994); William

Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia* (1995) and *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (1998).

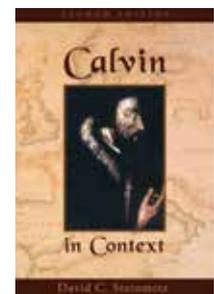
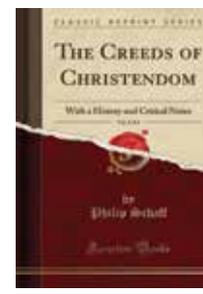
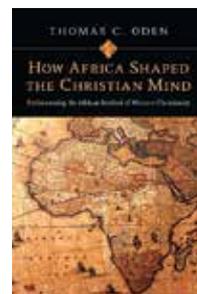
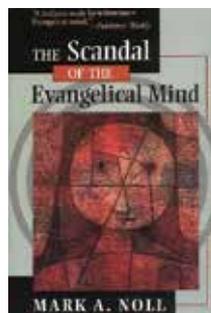
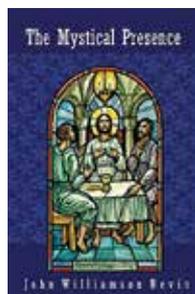
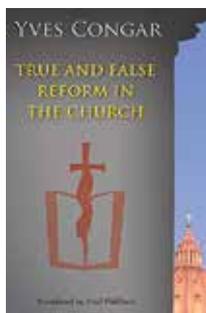
Philosophy: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (1981).

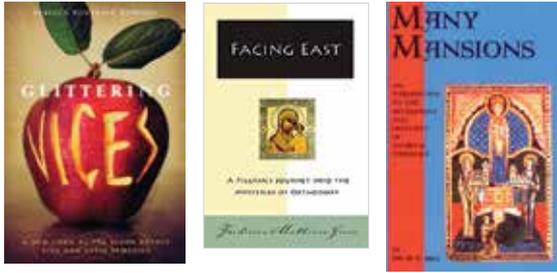
Spirituality/Ethics: Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (1978), *Prayer* (1992), and *Streams of Living Water* (2001); Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace* (1998) and *Acedia and Me* (2008); Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option* (2017); Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution* (2006); Jonathan Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World* (1998).

Liturgy: Robert Webber, *Common Roots* (1978), *Worship Is a Verb* (1992), *Blended Worship* (1996), *Ancient-Future Faith* (1999), and the *Complete Library of Christian Worship* series; Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (1956).

Biblical Studies: Thomas Oden, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*.

History: Thomas Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* (2007); Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*





(1877); David Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings* (1977), *Luther in Context* (1986), *Calvin in Context* (1995), and *Taking the Long View* (2011); Robert Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past* (1995) and *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (2003).

Memoir: Thomas Oden, *A Change of Heart* (2014); Robert Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail* (1985); Kathleen Norris, *Dakota* (1993) and *The Cloister Walk* (1996); Frederica Mathewes-Green, *Facing East* (1997); Scott Hahn, *Rome Sweet Home* (1993).

In addition some movements and people we've discussed have been the subjects of **secondary historical study**. Check out the *Christian Tradition* series by Jaroslav Pelikan (1975–1991); D. G. Hart, *John Williamson Nevin* (2005); John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (2008); Matthew Lamb and Matthew Levering, *Vatican II* (2008); Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology* (2009) and *Heavenly Participation* (2011); and Gary Moon, *Becoming Dallas Willard* (2018).

Our senior editor, Chris Armstrong, also recommends a few additional books for retrieving the best of **medieval faith**: David Bell, *Many Mansions* (1996); D. H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition* (1999); Dennis Okholm, *Monk Habits for Everyday People* (2007); and Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices* (2009).

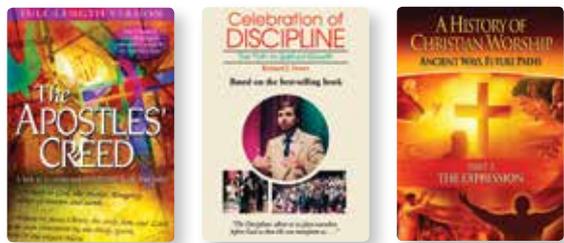


CHRISTIAN HISTORY ISSUES

It's truly difficult to suggest relevant past issues this time, because Christian History Institute has always been interested in recovering the stories of the past in the service of a generous orthodoxy. Here are just a few. You can read them all online, and some are still available for purchase.

- 24: Bernard of Clairvaux
- 37: Worship in the Early Church
- 42: Francis of Assisi
- 49: Everyday Faith in the Middle Ages
- 65: Ten Most Influential Christians
- 80: The First Bible Teachers
- 92: A New Evangelical Awakening
- 93: A Devoted Life
- 105: Christianity in Early Africa
- 106: The Stone-Campbell Movement
- 113: Seven Literary Sages (and previous issues on the "sages": 7, 75, 78, 86, and 88)
- 114: Methodism (and Methodist issues 2 and 69)
- Our 500th anniversary Reformation series (115, 118, 120, 122) and other Reformation issues (4, 5, 12, 34, 39, 48)
- 127: Medieval Lay Mystics

And don't forget our guide *The History of Worship from Constantine to the Reformation*.



VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO

Videos on this issue's topic include *The Apostles' Creed*, *Celebration of Discipline*, and *A History of Christian Worship*.

WEBSITES

You can find almost every organization in this issue easily by a quick online search. For more check out the Oden House, a scholarly retreat center; the Center for Early African Christianity; the Webber Center; the Webber Institute for Worship Studies; the Ancient-Future Faith Network; Renovaré; the official site devoted to Dallas Willard's memory, Dwillard.org; and the Mercersburg Society and Mercersburg Liturgy sites. The Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration can be found at the Vatican website. All of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together documents can be found at *First Things*, and many were also coreleased on *Christianity Today*. Many of Philip Schaff's writings are available at CCEL.



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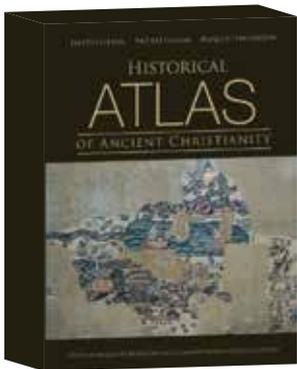
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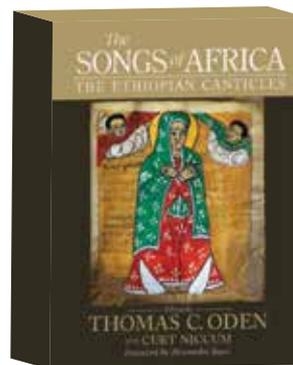


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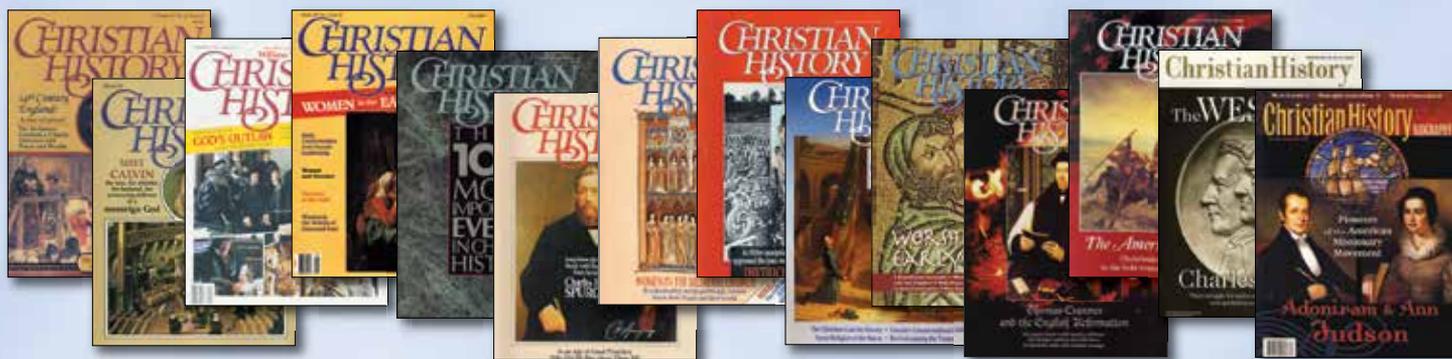
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