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Super Wolf Moon
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After Rilke's Marienleben: Birth of Mary
Wally Swist

Start
Marjorie Maddox

Follow Mist
John Poch

This color lithograph, part of the Brauer Museum's permanent collection, is by Jeanette Pasin Sloan (b. 1946), an artist and educator whose pieces are in major museums across the country and around the world. *Trinity* is an example of this important American artist's hyper-real still lifes and showcases her technical virtuosity. The Brauer Museum has had a long relationship with Jeanette Pasin Sloan; the museum received her complete archives, consisting of paintings, drawings, and original prints from all periods, as well as key documents from throughout her life and career. We at the Brauer Museum are thrilled to have these archives, made possible by the combination of a gift from the artist and a generous donation by the Byron Lee and Josephine Luecke Ferguson Donated Fund. Scholars and admirers of Jeanette Pasin Sloan's work can look to the Brauer Museum as an essential resource for continued study of her art.

On the back cover: "Moon and Clouds" by Alessandro Stagni. Original is at https://flic.kr/p/p1Bvpf.

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if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8

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Poco a Poco

LANGUAGES WERE NOT MY STRONG SUIT IN SCHOOL. After three excruciating years of high school French, I switched to Spanish in college. My professor was a kind, chatty Peruvian who frequently spoke about her beautiful country and its rich culture. I lasted a year—the required minimum—and was glad when it was done.

It wasn't that I didn't want to know Spanish. It was just that I hated making mistakes and loathed that awkward, inarticulate feeling of knowing what I wanted to say but not being able to say it.

Years later, I found myself (otra vez!) back in a college classroom, auditing a Spanish class in preparation for—of all things—a year in Lima, Peru, with my family. The auditing status made it tolerable; I was relieved not to worry about a grade or fulfilling a requirement. More importantly, though, I knew that if I didn't pay attention, I'd have a much harder time surviving the year ahead.

That class didn't make me fluent in Spanish, but I learned enough to get by and enjoy the year. On occasions when I needed to be certain I communicated clearly, I called on my friend Celia. Celia was a native Limeña with impeccable English. She would translate my English into mellifluous Spanish, then interpret the Spanish response back into English for me, later explaining particular idioms and turns of phrases.

I mention this because Peter C. Meilaender's essay, "Crossed Lines: The Importance of Translation in an Era of Growing Political Difference" (page 4), reminded me of Celia and her translation superpower. "Not all of us need to be such translators," Meilaender writes, "but all of us should honor them, and we should want our public life to be enriched by their work as intermediaries, go-betweens, ambassadors." I couldn't agree more—and a decade later I remain indebted to Celia for her expertise and her willingness to share it so graciously.

While Celia's work was invaluable, I was glad for the effort I made in the class I audited. Sure, my language skills weren't great by the end of the class, but at least I had something. In those early days and weeks in Peru, Celia and others kept repeating one phrase to me: "Poco a poco." Little by little. I still take delight (perhaps a disproportionate level of delight!) in remembering the first conversation in which I was able to follow along in Spanish rather than trying to translate each word into English, as I had previously done. It had taken months, but finally I felt as if I were floating along a river rather than paddling furiously just to keep from sinking. Friends and acquaintances encouraged me to have patience and keep trying, so I did. It made a difference.

THE TOPIC OF DAVID K. WEBER'S COLUMN, "BUEN Camino" (page 47)—a pilgrimage on the Way of St. James in Spain—reminds me also of the importance of taking things poco a poco. "With each painful step," Weber writes, "the pilgrim freely chooses slow progress toward the fulfillment of the truly desired end," And: "A pilgrim knows that the harder the walk, the happier the rest; the lengthier the fast, the more gratifying the feast."

All of this somehow reminds me of Simone Weil's 1940s essay "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," in which she writes that not only is it acceptable for students to have no interest or aptitude for a particular subject, but that it can actually be advantageous as they pursue their studies. A student who doesn't like or isn't good at, oh, say, languages, needs to work really hard to try to understand the subject. That work does indeed pay off, even if it's not in the classroom (although that would be ideal). "Even if our efforts of attention seem for years to be producing no result, one day a light that is in exact proportion to them will flood the soul," Weil writes. "Every effort adds a little gold to a treasure no power on earth can take away."

—HGG

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Crossed Lines

The Importance of Translation in an Era of Growing Political Difference

Peter C. Meilaender

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:1-9)

In Book XIX of The City of God, St. Augustine reflects upon the many sources of discord in human life, among family members, friends, fellow citizens, and nations. Commenting on the last of these, and the challenges that international misunderstanding poses for peace, he wryly observes:

The diversity of languages separates man from man. For if two men meet, and are forced by some compelling reason not to pass on but to stay in company, then if neither knows the other’s language, it is easier for dumb animals, even of different kinds, to associate together than these men, although both are human beings. For when men cannot communicate their thoughts to each other, simply because of difference of language, all the similarity of their common human nature is of no avail to unite them in fellowship. So true is this that a man would be more cheerful with his dog for company than with a foreigner.

His observation is funny. It is also probably all too true. The difference in language among human beings, as Augustine says, is an impediment to “fellowship.”

To explain this unfortunate situation, Christians have for centuries looked back—whether literally or figuratively—to the story of the Tower of Babel. The division of humanity into language groups—into separate tribes of limited mutual intelligibility—is a punishment. There was a time when all spoke the same language. But this ease of communication and cooperation was such a spur to human ingenuity that it prompted grandiose dreams of ascending into the heavens. The Lord, apparently sensing that the tower was only a foretaste of even more hubristic schemes, decided to put an end to this overwhelming human urge. And the remedy he chose was linguistic division. Scattered over the face of the earth, human beings would no longer attempt to storm the heavens,
remaining instead in their own distinct camps, indifferent if not hostile to one another.

I was prompted to reflect on this over the summer by a substantial piece of leisure reading I decided to undertake: the recent collection *Found in Translation: 100 of the Finest Short Stories Ever Translated*, edited by Frank Wynne and published in 2018 by a British publisher named Head of Zeus Press. The volume may pull together "short" stories, but a hundred of them still make for a hefty tome of more than nine hundred pages. The anthology is a kind of literary effort to reverse the consequences of the Tower of Babel, bringing together the peoples of the world not in one city, to be sure, but at least between two covers.

It is an impressive effort—perhaps not quite as ambitious as building a tower with its top in the heavens, but still, as Wynne remarks in his introduction, "the task of selecting one hundred from the countless stories translated from any language, from any country is—to say the least—a daunting task." He has brought together a wide range of tales, from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, North and South America, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent. Two "A's are not represented: Australia (perhaps surprisingly) and Antarctica (not). Still, this sprawling miscellany opens windows onto a remarkably wide variety of literary traditions.

One would have to be extraordinarily well read to be already familiar with all the gems in this collection. One story new to me, for example, "It Snows," was written by the Italian Enrico Castelnuovo (1839-1915) and translated by Edith Wharton. With gentle understatement and humor, Castelnuovo describes the relationship between a father and his young daughter as it is tested by the tempting presence of an attractive young widow on the lookout for a promising second marriage—a temptation the father ultimately resists, with a bit of encouragement from his little girl. Another, "Sorrow-Acre" by Karen Blixen, under the pseudonym of Isak Dinesen (1885-1962), is translated by the author herself from Danish into English. Dinesen mixes reflections upon patriotism, love, and justice into this tale of a landed nobleman, one of whose peasants has been convicted of arson and sentenced to death. The young man insists upon his innocence, and his aged mother comes to plead for him, whereupon the nobleman offers her the chance to save his life if she can complete the impossible task of mowing a large rye-field all on her own between sunrise and sunset. Incredibly, she completes the task, only to collapse in her son's arms, dead from exhaustion but apparently satisfied. I knew of Dinesen but had never read anything by her; "Sorrow-Acre" will make me look for more.

Moving beyond Europe, I had certainly never heard of the Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925-2006), whose story "All That Is Gone" was translated by Willem Samuels. It is a remarkably sensitive story in which the narrator recalls and attempts to piece together scattered memories from her girlhood. These reveal her dawning awareness of loss and desertion as her youthful self comes to realize that her father's frequent absences—which cause her significant anxiety and plunge her mother into bouts of tears and fervent prayer—involve more than simply "an extreme deal of work," as he routinely explains. We as readers piece the story...
together gradually, along with the young girl, in a fashion that is all the more moving because our intuition of the situation exceeds her own limited understanding.

One final example of a story previously unknown to me is "A Woman Like Me" by Xi Xi, pen name of the Chinese author Zhang Yan (b. 1938), and translated by Howard Goldblatt. Xi Xi offers another first-person female narrative, this time of a woman wondering whether a budding romantic relationship can survive her boyfriend's pending visit to her place of work. Previous relationships—of all sorts, not only romantic—have foundered on this very rock; people have trouble relating to this woman who spends her days as a "cosmetician," but one of an unexpected kind: she is a cosmetician to the dead, preparing them for their coffins. Her situation is humorous, but her hopes and fears are touching, and they prompt the reader to reflect upon the social position of all those who do work that is necessary but perhaps unappealing.

It is tempting to continue rattling off new discoveries—Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Ismail Kadare, Satyajit Ray, Pawel Huelle, Teresa Solana. It is equally tempting, with a collection like this, to begin looking for telltale characteristics of different national or linguistic groups. That is a dangerous game, because it lends itself all too easily to cultural stereotyping, and in any case the sample size of even a well-represented language in this volume is too small to draw any reliable conclusions. Even so, the Italian and French contributions have a marked note of social realism; the South American samples are imaginative and fantastical; the eastern European ones pleasantly quirky and eccentric. Or was that perhaps merely my own imagination? Interestingly, one group of stories did stand out to me as noticeably alien: the Japanese examples. Again, the sample size is small—six stories—but at least five of the six felt very much as if they were coming from a profoundly different cultural context than my own. Several exhibited a kind of fascination with darkness and even violence. One, a story by Yukio Mishima with the disconcerting title "Patriotism," describes in unsettling detail a husband and wife's double suicide in the name of honor. Another portrays a geisha's transformation into a sexual predator through the acquisition of a large and elaborate black widow spider tattoo upon her back. A third, considerably less disturbing, nevertheless culminates in a poor and hungry servant's beating an old woman and stealing her clothes. Even Shūsaku Endō's "Incredible Voyage" is a bizarre blend of coarse humor and science fiction. Reading these, I truly had the sense that I was catching a glimpse of a different mindset, an alternative way of seeing the world. The task of translation has not concluded but only begun with the move from one language into another.

But that "task of translation"—what is it, exactly? One of my ulterior motives in reading this collection was to ponder precisely that question, or perhaps a slightly more specific one: what is the task of translation in our world, today? For we should not forget that Found in Translation is not merely an anthology of world literature; it is more specifically a collection of stories in translation. As Wynne notes in the introduction:

[With the exception of those few authors who have translated their own work...the words you are reading are those of translators. If, as Susan Sontag says, translation is the 'circulatory system of the world's literatures,' then translators are the beating heart that makes it possible for stories to flow beyond borders and across oceans.

Without their work, few of us could access more than a handful of the stories that Wynne has collected. And I suspect it is no accident that this volume appeared when it did. When the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union collapsed thirty years ago, it appeared for a while as though the world were on the cusp of a new age of international friendship and cooperation. We spoke of the "end of history" and of a "new world order." That confidence was shaken by the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror; it is being shaken again by the wave of populist and nationalist sentiment sweeping the West, and more ominously by the rise of nationalist authoritarianism in
countries such as Russia and China. Migration and refugees are among the hottest of hot-button issues; tariffs on trade once again threaten international commerce. Dreams of global cooperation and solidarity seem hopelessly outdated.

Indeed, it seems clear by now that the defining political division of our age is no longer the familiar right-left, conservative-liberal divide. Instead, democracies throughout the West now find themselves torn by disagreements over nationalism and identity politics. This has driven political realignments, new partisan coalitions, and, in Europe, the decline of many traditional parties of the center-right and center-left. President Trump’s tariffs are the perfect symbol of these new battle lines. Those tariffs would have been unthinkable under previous Republican presidents, but the old debate between free trade and government regulation has been reframed in terms of arguments about the national interest. Similarly, the agonizing Brexit debate in Great Britain has turned on the issues of migration and, more fundamentally, national sovereignty, in a way that has sparked internal disagreement within both the Tory and the Labour parties. The inchoate gilets jaunes movement in France—the yellow vests—has been largely a populist protest against establishment elites for ignoring the concerns of ordinary voters. French socialists can agree with the right-wing Rassemblement National (formerly the Front National) that France needs to regain sovereignty lost to Brussels, a surprising common ground that remains highly disorienting for anyone whose political memory reaches back more than a decade or so.

The public arguments surrounding this new nationalism are frequently unsatisfying. Too often they degenerate into a shouting match between what one might call the rootless cosmopolitans on the one side and the jingoist, my-country-right-or-wrongers on the other. Indeed, the two sides feed off of each other in a perverse symbiotic relationship. The new nationalists like nothing better than to stick a rhetorical finger in the eye of distant, out-of-touch elites in the government, economy, media, and professions. Incensed by such populist provocateurs, their opponents lash back with accusations of far-right populism (which is often code language to signal fascism or neonazism), racism, or merely reactionary antediluvianism. Each time the rhetorical ante is upped, the other side has to retaliate in kind. The result is that large numbers of ordinary citizens—those, for example, who support state-regulated immigration but oppose mass deportations or separating children from their parents, or those who generally embrace a free market but are concerned about the hollowing out of middle-class and especially rural America—increasingly feel themselves politically homeless, or simply tune out altogether.

It seems clear by now that the defining political division of our age is no longer the familiar right-left, conservative-liberal divide. Instead, democracies throughout the West now find themselves torn by disagreements over nationalism and identity politics.

It should be clear enough, I think, that neither of these alternatives offers a very appealing perspective. Christians especially should strive to articulate a richer and more nuanced point of view. Christians know that we have special obligations toward those with whom we share special bonds: husbands and wives; parents and children; teachers, students, and colleagues; friends, parishioners, neighbors, and our fellow citizens. But we understand also that all people are our brothers and sisters in Christ—his children, made in his image. Thus we feel an interest in the lives of all persons, everywhere, and in the diverse cultures they create. Indeed, we do not simply feel an interest in them—that is too neutral a phrase. From within our own cultures and obligations, we seek to understand others, and we feel affection for them. We wish each other well.
In a political context such as this one, the labor of translation becomes almost a kind of political act, perhaps even an act of faith.

A commitment to translation occupies precisely the middle ground in that unsatisfactory debate I just described. Translators are anything but rootless cosmopolitans. Their goal is neither escape from nor obliteration of the local, or national, or parochial. On the contrary, translation aims precisely at conveying strange or alien thoughts and expressions into the local idiom. Were our particular languages and dialects to vanish, translation would be entirely unnecessary—a notion to which I shall return shortly. Translation presupposes the existence of a multitude of particular vernaculars. At the same time, translation always bursts the confines of the merely parochial, expanding its horizons and challenging it through the encounter with the unfamiliar—not, I think, out of a mere desire to be critical or any universalist longing for enlightenment, but due to a genuine interest in the other. Good translators are always, it seems to me, simultaneously lovers of the local and of plurality—“global pluralists” and “local loyalists,” to borrow a pair of terms from Michael Walzer. Something like that combination is precisely what Christians should be striving for, and indeed it may be a contribution to our public discourse that Christians are uniquely well-situated to make.

But perhaps, you might retort, I am indulging in an overly romantic image of translation. Consider two ways in which one might raise such an objection, one linguistic and political, the other theological. First, one might argue that translation is simply becoming irrelevant, in much the same way, and for the same reason (so the claim goes), that the teaching of foreign languages is becoming irrelevant. We can do without learning foreign languages and without the effort of translation because computers can handle all of this for us. We don’t need translators, we don’t need translations—we just need Google Translate.

It is certainly the case that software programs like Google Translate have made great strides in recent years and are likely to improve even further. My wife teaches German, and every semester she is certain to catch at least one student using Google Translate to cheat on homework. Sometimes she catches them because the program’s translation is too bad; but more often than not, it is because the translation is too good. When a first-semester German student produces sentences that correctly use the subjunctive, one knows that something is amiss. Clearly programs like these have tremendous utility, whether for getting a rough sense of a text or document, for travel and tourism, or for other ordinary uses.

Still, if we recall the Tower of Babel, we might pause for just a moment. For Google Translate represents in some sense the aspiration to overcome Babel’s consequences. “Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language; that they may not understand one another’s speech,” says the Lord, “that they may not understand one another’s speech.” And he “scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth.” Unchastened, however, Google Translate says, “Let us ensure that they all understand one another’s speech, that confusion may vanish.” There is something almost uncanny in the way that software like Google Translate strives almost perfectly to undo the effects of Babel.

One would not for that reason want to condemn online translators, which surely have their uses; but perhaps one might hesitate before the hubristic notion that they could entirely remove obstacles to mutual human understanding or make the hard work and effort required for its achievement obsolete.

Perhaps, though, we might push the argument a step further and even claim biblical sanction for the replacement of translation and translators by Google Translate. For—at the risk of seeming flippant—don’t we see a kind of divine Google Translate at work in the New Testament? The counterpart to the Tower of Babel, after all, is Pentecost. As we read in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles:
When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabsians, we hear them telling in their own tongues the mighty works of God.”

It is as if everyone present has a tiny Google Translate app plugged directly into his ear! Before there was Google Translate, there was Paraclete Translate. And one might be tempted to conclude from this picture that the ideal is not a world of translators but rather one in which no effort at translation is required any longer.

Surely this is too hasty, however. Perhaps it is sufficient to answer flippancy with flippancy: when you find the Holy Spirit whispering translations directly into your ear, then indeed you may dispense with the effort of translation yourself.

More seriously, we might observe that what we see in Acts is not a merely human action. Rather, it is a foreshadowing of the Kingdom and the direct work of God himself, answering to his earlier act at Babel. The Lord confused human languages at Babel, and it is the same Lord who undoes that confusion at Pentecost. (Though not, it is interesting to note, by obliterating the multiplicity of human languages and replacing them with a single one, as if the ideal were a kind of paracletian Esperanto.) If the Old Testament story is a warning against human hubris, then it would be further hubris to suppose that any mere human contrivance could replace divine intervention in the New.

Yet perhaps this response is still too easy. We can and should say more. This way of reading the story of Pentecost, as a divine analogue for Google Translate, oversimplifies the work of translation. It treats it as though it were the purely verbal substitution of a set of words in one language for a set of words in another. But the kind of translation we need—at least until the day when the human race is once again “one people” and no longer scattered over the face of the earth—is considerably more than that. For good translation is never a literal one-to-one substitution of one word for another. Rather, it is an effort to make available in one cultural and linguistic milieu thoughts and ideas that originated in another. Anyone who has ever attempted a translation knows that this is a difficult task, calling not only for knowledge of both cultures and languages but also for sensitivity, judgment, and—since the most faithful translation is not always a literal one—creativity. And also, I would add, charity. Only a true lover of both the source and target languages and cultures is likely to produce a rich, resonant, faithful translation. In Josef Pieper’s reformulation of a well-known sermon by Augustine, “Only the lover sings.”

I would add that only the lover is a faithful translator. We today need more such translators—more people with the kind of curiosity and good will that motivates them to move outside their home culture, and with the kind of love that inspires them to return to it again, bringing
with them the fruits of their travels. Not all of us need to be such translators, but all of us should honor them, and we should want our public life to be enriched by their work as intermediaries, go-betweens, ambassadors. At its best, that work embodies a form of intellectual virtue that holds out the promise of mutual understanding without papering over genuine difference. It accepts the consequences of Babel while maintaining the hope that division and confusion need not be the last word, the ultimate and incorrigible fate of humanity. It calls us to sing a polyphonic new song, with multiple languages in counterpoint and in harmony.

Peter C. Meilaender is a professor of political science at Houghton College.

Works Cited


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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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7. In a separate section entitled "Works Cited," list alphabetically by author (and, within author, by year of publication) all items that are cited in the text. Provide complete bibliographical information, including author's first name, publisher, and place and date of publication. Examples:


ARK

The word for "word" in modern Hebrew, is "tebah." It is the same word that is used for "ark" in the Bible. "Noah" means "to rest in." There are also words for "poet" and "flood," but we won't talk about them, because the poets are drowning too. They cannot rest in their fine words any more than you can.

Still, we sail off, we sail off in such frail arks. What else can we do with our words but set them down like planks, and fasten them together by some aching joinery of the heart into an ark where we stow, two by two, everything worth saving. Still, there are no words for this vessel, for this journey, for these miraculous creatures.

Or, rather, there are just words. Just words. The poets know this, the poets who fashioned Hebrew, who hewed it from the bloody lumber of inarticulateness. Somehow, they hobbled together an ark, set sail for a shore that did not yet exist. There is a word for this Possible / Impossible Shore. It is the one word in Hebrew that is never spoken.

Richard Schiffman
RECENTLY TAUGHT AN HONORS COLLEGE SEMINAR that included on the syllabus an exploration of the topic of forgiveness. All of the students in the seminar were professed Christians, though they did of course differ from one another in terms of denominational affiliation and theological literacy. Even so, they seemed to agree with one another completely about certain basic features of forgiveness. Whatever it was, they all said, it had to be offered unconditionally and unilaterally to those who had wrongly offended or otherwise injured them. It did not matter whether the offender was repentant or contrite. Nor did it even matter whether the offender knew that he or she had been forgiven by the victim. Forgiveness relieved the offended party from feelings of revenge or resentment so that he or she could “move on.”

This apparent unanimity of opinion quickly crumbled in view of the assigned readings and in response to interrogation. If we are to forgive as Christ forgives us and because Christ forgives us, should we conclude that Christ forgives us primarily for his sake rather than for ours? Would we actually be forgiven if we had no knowledge that we had been? If we inform someone that we have forgiven them for something that they did not and still do not regard as wrongful, would they be right to think us presumptuous and offensive? Are people who wrongly injure us and repent of it to be treated in the same way as people who wrongly injure us and feel no regret or remorse for doing what they did? When the psalmist asks God to “wash away my sin; make my guilt disappear,” does this not suggest that forgiveness has something to do with the removal of the offender’s subjective and/or objective guilt? If so, does this not presume that offenders must be informed that they have been forgiven by their victims? As often happens in seminars, the students quickly came to doubt whether they really thought what they initially claimed they had thought.

In order to make these questions and perplexities clearer, we read together with some care a philosophical treatment of forgiveness written by someone whose own perspective on the matter was avowedly secular. By comparison to my students’ Christian view of forgiveness, the secular philosopher’s view seemed remarkably stringent and demanding, so much so that many students were initially quite troubled by it. The author of the book, Charles L. Griswold, describes at considerable length a picture of what he calls “perfect forgiveness.” In other words, he establishes an ideal that he believes we should all strive to approximate, even though we cannot always meet all of the conditions he describes as being essential to “perfect forgiveness.”

For Griswold, unlike the students, forgiveness must be a morally transformative social transaction between two people, the offender and the victim. In other words, forgiveness should change for the better both the offender who inflicted an unjust injury and the victim who feels resentment toward the offender and who may harbor thoughts of revenge. “Perfect forgiveness” cannot be unilateral or unconditional. Moreover, the larger goal of forgiveness is relieving the offend-
er's guilt rather than diminishing the victim's resentment. Griswold develops this picture of perfect forgiveness in considerable detail. He first lists six conditions that the offender must meet in order to qualify for forgiveness and he then outlines six parts of forgiveness that the victim must complete.

In order to qualify for or merit forgiveness, offenders must 1) take responsibility for what they did by acknowledging performance of the injurious actions; 2) repudiate those injuries by acknowledging that they were wrong; 3) express regret over the wrongdoing; and 4) commit in word and deed to becoming the sort of persons who would not in the future inflict similar unjust injuries upon others. Taken together, these four conditions that the offender must meet are called "contrition." But there remain two additional conditions: 5) offenders need to show that they understand, from the victims' point of view, the damage caused by the injury, and 6) finally, offenders must offer their victims an account of how they came to do what they did.

Once offenders have met all of these conditions (and remember that Griswold is describing "perfect forgiveness" here), the victims must 1) forswear revenge, promising to undertake no personal retributive action (note that this does not mean that victims must refrain from cooperating with the state in order to achieve justice in a courtroom); 2) reduce feelings of resentment; 3) commit to gradual elimination of resentment altogether; 4) refuse to reduce the offenders to their actions, i.e. refuse to consider the offenders "bad people"; 5) drop all feelings of moral superiority and recognize instead the shared humanity of offenders and victims; and 6) address the offenders to inform them that forgiveness has been granted.

Most Christians would agree with Griswold's fine description of what forgiveness means for the victimized party, for the forgiver—except for the requirement that the victim must inform the offender that forgiveness has been granted. Bishop Desmond Tutu, for example, in a book that he wrote about forgiveness with his daughter Mpho, outlines a "fourfold path" to forgiveness that is in many ways identical to Griswold's description of what the victim must do in order to forgive (after forgiveness, the victim becomes a "hero" in Tutu's view). However, Tutu is quite clear that forgiveness is not something we do on behalf of the offender; we do it on behalf of ourselves. "When we forgive, we take back control of our own fate and our feelings. We become our own liberators. We don't forgive to help the other person. We forgive for ourselves. Forgiveness, in other words, is the best form of self-interest. This is true both spiritually and scientifically."

My students, it turns out, had ample support for their initial views of forgiveness. Christians would seem to be almost uniformly opposed to the conditional character of forgiveness as Griswold understands it.

Tutu is but one of many outstanding Christian theologians, philosophers, and pastors who argue that forgiveness is for the sake of the forgiver and that it is unilateral and unconditional. For example, the distinguished Catholic philosopher Eleonore Stump, following Aquinas, argues against what she takes to be the "common view" among writers like Griswold on forgiveness, which makes forgiveness contingent upon repentance and reparation on the part of the offender. On the contrary, since forgiveness is an expression of Christian love, which desires both the good of the other and union with him, it must be offered without conditions and out of a desire for reconciliation. The parable of the prodigal son provides the decisive image of forgiveness on this account. My students, it turns out, had ample support for their initial views of forgiveness. Christians would seem to be almost uniformly opposed to the conditional character of forgiveness as Griswold understands it. Tutu's "fourfold path" to forgiveness never depends upon anything the offender does or does not do until the victim decides at the end of the process whether to
renew or to release the relationship between him or herself and the offender. Renewal depends at least to some degree upon the willingness of the offender to begin a new relationship.

II

This apparent unanimity of theological opinion about the nature of forgiveness may not be what it first seems, however. Consider Tutu’s example. Only seven pages after he has stated quite categorically that we do not forgive to help the other person, he says, “Forgiveness is the grace by which we enable another person to get up, and get up with dignity, to begin anew.” Later in his book, Tutu considers pertinent biblical examples of forgiveness. He writes, “In the Christian tradition, we often recall the story of the repentant criminal who was crucified beside Jesus. Like other Lutheran theologians... Bonhoeffer can be quoted against himself. He too was of a divided mind, so he can write at times as though forgiveness is unconditional and at other times as though it is most definitely not unconditional.

Like other Lutheran theologians... Bonhoeffer can be quoted against himself. He too was of a divided mind, so he can write at times as though forgiveness is unconditional and at other times as though it is most definitely not unconditional.

a man who had committed crimes punishable by death. Jesus promised him that, because of his repentance, ‘this day we will see one another in paradise.’ He was forgiven.” We would seem to have here an authoritative example of forgiveness, cited approvingly by Tutu, in which the forgiveness was given in response to repentance and was openly pronounced to the offender.

Some notable Lutheran theologians have taken the story of Christ’s forgiving the repentant thief on the cross as normative both for the Church and for the individual Christian. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example, in his much-quoted opening to The Cost of Discipleship, critiques unconditional forgiveness dispensed by the Church as being at the very heart of what he means by cheap grace. “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession.” However, like other Lutheran theologians and perhaps most Christian theologians, Bonhoeffer can be quoted against himself. He too was of a divided mind, so he can write at times as though forgiveness is unconditional and at other times as though it is most definitely not unconditional.

In addition to the equivocations already noted, Christians have, I think, at least three additional good reasons to wonder about notions of forgiveness as unconditional and unilateral. First, the patterns of routine forgiveness in everyday life among religious and non-religious people alike are seldom unconditional and unilateral. Tutu discusses these daily family dramas at length. A typical scene involves a child carelessly breaking a vase, admitting it, weeping over it, feeling ashamed, promising to make amends and to never do such a thing again, etc. In return, the parent admits distress but quickly offers forgiveness to the child who gladly accepts it even though the child may be asked to make some kind of restitution. So our first sense that forgiveness is to some degree conditional arises from our common experience.

Second, Christians are formed by the liturgy. And Sunday services do not begin with an announcement of God’s forgiveness of all of our sins in order for God to feel good about Himself and to liberate Him from enslavement to the anger and resentment he feels toward us. Instead, our Lutheran services begin with our acknowledgement of our sins, our repentance for them, our resolve to do better, and our beseeching God for forgiveness. Then, “in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ,” the pastor forgives us all our sins. We might well view this weekly ritual as the liturgical expression of what Bonhoeffer means by “costly grace.” Whatever may be the case theologically, liturgically we are habituated to think that forgiveness comes to us from a loving God in response to our contrition and repentance. Should we not then think that our forgiveness of others should depend to some
extent upon their acknowledgement of wrongdoing and their remorse over it?

Third, finally, and perhaps most importantly, Scripture seems to suggest more often than not that forgiveness is as much for the benefit of the sinner as for the benefit of the one offering forgiveness, whether the one offering is God or another human being. A whole genre of the Psalms, the penitential psalms, is filled with cries of repentance and pleas for the relief of guilt through forgiveness. Should we not therefore think of forgiving our brother or sister as at least in part an effort to relieve him or her from guilt? Though the biblical record is mixed, as it so often is, on the character of Jesus's forgiveness of our sins, we have already noted that some of the most memorable stories of forgiveness seem to portray it as a response to repentance. Moreover, Jesus confers upon the disciples and by implication the church the power to forgive or to retain sins. Again, if forgiveness is unconditional, on what possible basis could the church retain sins? According to the “Office of the Keys,” the church should forgive the sins of the penitent and retain the sins of the impenitent.

III

Though everyday life, liturgical practice, and the biblical record do challenge standard assumptions among Christians about forgiveness, there may be ways to retain most of these assumptions even as Christians acknowledge the force of the challenges. Christians might, for example, distinguish between forgiveness and reconciliation. As Tutu notes, forgiveness may lead to reconciliation or renewal of relationship, but it need not do so. So we might say that though forgiveness is unilateral and unconditional, reconciliation is mutual and conditional. Indeed, genuine reconciliation with someone who has wronged us may well include, on the wrongdoer's part, some of the very “conditions” that Griswold lists as qualifications for forgiveness. Indeed, perhaps Griswold has things backwards. Forgiveness, at least for Christians, comes first, unconditionally, and may lead to the offender's acknowledgement of wrongdoing, remorse for it, resolution to refrain from such wrong actions in the future, and empathy for the victim's suffering. And these actions may in turn lead to reconciliation with the injured party who has forgiven the wrongdoer. Though the idea of reconciliation as distinct from forgiveness may help to resolve some of the difficulties about forgiveness, it does presume that the victim must declare forgiveness to the offender if there is to be any chance of reconciliation.

A second way of resolving some of the difficulties we have considered may be to recall another famous scene in Scripture, the moment when Jesus prays, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Notice that Jesus does not forgive those who crucified him directly; he prays that the Father should do so. So we might say, remembering that only God finally has the power to forgive sins directly or indirectly through those acting in God's stead, that we should ask God to unilaterally and unconditionally forgive those who have
injured us even though we may well require that some conditions be met before we forgive them. Thus, we can find a way to be unconditional and conditional at the same time: unconditional in our prayer, conditional in our forgiving relation with those who have offended us.

A third way of resolving the problem of the unconditional character of forgiveness turns the second strategy on its head. Instead of construing God’s forgiveness as unconditional while our forgiveness of others remains conditional, we might argue, following Bonhoeffer and others, that God’s grace is costly in order that ours may be cheap for our neighbors. **Because** we are forgiven, repentant sinners, we can and should be forgiving, i.e. willing and ready to forgive those who have wronged us without requiring of them what God requires of us. These two diametrically opposite strategies do not so much present us with a choice as they raise a fundamental question. To what extent should our practices of forgiveness mirror exactly God’s forgiveness of us? To what extent should we strive to imitate in everyday life with our neighbors, the Church’s practices of forgiveness, as the Church acts in God’s stead?

Fourth and finally, Christians might resolve many of the issues surrounding the concept of forgiveness by re-conceptualizing the whole matter as one of character rather than individual acts. Instead of asking what exactly an act of forgiveness entails, ask what the virtue of forgiveness involves. Such a virtue would be part of what it means to be “Christ-like,” and it might be subsumed as a smaller virtue under the larger virtue of charity. Forgiveness would involve the disposition to forswear revenge and resentment and to seek instead a restored relationship. However, like all the other Christian virtues, charity and forgiveness would be governed by Christian practical wisdom, the virtue that would enable Christians to forgive in the right way at the right time for the right reasons. The path to forgiving well would not be laid out in advance. Instead, forgiveness may or may not include or require repentance and contrition in a particular case. The overall intention would be to forgive in all cases; however, forgiving well in any particular case would involve doing what good forgiveness requires in that case. Under this re-description, forgiveness is a specific kind of charitable exercise, subject to a wide variety of contextual considerations, but seeking, as love always seeks, the good of the other and union with that other in at least a common humanity.

**Forgiveness is a specific kind of charitable exercise, subject to a wide variety of contextual considerations, but seeking, as love always seeks, the good of the other and union with that other in at least a common humanity.**

Why should Christians trouble themselves to examine their standard assumptions about forgiveness being unilateral, unconditional, and private, i.e. not even shared with the offender? After all, if forgiveness is done simply for the sake of the one doing the forgiving, as Tutu sometimes argues and as most Christians think, it should be **much** easier to persuade Christians to forgive others than it would be if forgiveness were primarily for the sake of others, for those who have offended. This is, as they say, human nature. There can be **no** question that forgiveness is good for the forgiver, psychologically, spiritually, even physically. Bishop Tutu references and summarizes the immense amount of social-scientific research that documents this fact. And this research in turn informs an avalanche of popular culture treatments of forgiveness as being both good and good for you. As recently as May 19, 2019, for example, Tim Herrera wrote a piece for the New York Times entitled “Let Go of Your Grudges! They’re Doing You No Good.” During the course of his column, he cited the huge Stanford Forgiveness Project, which has conclusively shown that forgiveness reduces stress, reduces anger (as it should), improves the health...
of your heart, and just generally enhances your physical and psychological well-being.

"Great news!" Christians may say. And up to a point, they should. Christians should certainly not be sorry about the discovery that forgiveness is good for the body as well as the soul. They should probably stop short of rejoicing over what they take to be the discovery that Jesus was, in addition to being the Son of God, an excellent psychotherapist before his time. In other words, Christians should wonder about whether their primary motive to forgive should be improvement of their own cardiac health. What about the offender and the burden of guilt he or she carries? Should concern about this and for the offender’s overall wellbeing have no place in a Christian’s motive to forgive? Something can be at one and the same time good for others and good for oneself. The question is where the Christian should put the emphasis. Is forgiveness primarily a spiritual practice or a form of therapy? Tutu reminds us that forgiveness is by no means an exclusively religious practice, and for secular people forgiveness therefore may well be an exclusively private matter of self-therapy. But for Christians, forgiveness is a religious practice, so that even though it may improve their health, they should, I think, worry over whether that should be the main or the only reason they forgive their brothers and sisters.

What practical difference does this all make for Christians? I think that, apart from matters of motivation, forgiveness for Christians must entail announcing forgiveness to the offender if this is possible. Of course in those cases that most arise in psychotherapeutic situations, the offender or offenders (often parents) cannot be told they are forgiven, because they are deceased. So in these cases, we do the best that we can in prayer, in the healing of memory, and in sharing the news with other family members. But these cases, emotionally powerful as they may be, should not tempt us to think that in the vast majority of cases where it is possible to let those who have wrongly injured us know that they have been forgiven by us and by God, we may choose whether or not to do so. Indeed, I would argue that we must do so.

In sum, Christians should think hard about forgiveness for many reasons. First, its practice is close to the heart of the Christian gospel. Second, since forgiveness is both a secular and a religious practice, it is all too easy to lose sight of those aspects of the practice that are distinctively Christian. Third and finally, what we think about forgiveness informs the motive, the manner, and the substance of our practice. Thought of a certain kind leads to action of a certain kind. Of course, for Christians, it is the Lord who finally enables us to forgive. And though we may not be able to be certain of many things involving forgiveness, of one thing we can be sure. The Lord did not forgive us for His sake, but for ours.

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Works Cited


AFTER RILKE'S MARIENLEBEN: BIRTH OF MARY

Ah, who knows what the price may have been
For the angels not to burst out in song, weeping,
Especially after all they understood; for the mother,
Emerged tonight, she who will bear the son, the one

Who will arise. Levitating in silence, they pointed
The way to where Joachim was husband to the land;
Oh, the taut fullness that infused them, buoyant and
Airborne, though not one could descend to him. Both

Were beyond comprehension with what was transpiring.
The wise friend next door arrived, but was at a loss
What to do, except to tend to the black cow, who then
Ceased mooing. Never was there such a night as this.

Wally Swist
The Didache, an influential first-century Christian text, offers practical instructions for performing baptism: “Give public instruction on all these points, and then baptize in running water, 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm.” (Richardson, 174).

While the New Testament is rich in baptismal theology, it does not delve deeply into the practices of baptism. The Didache filled this void by addressing the practical baptism questions that arose within the early church: What is said in baptism? How much water should be used? What kind of water? This ancient text gives modern theologians a glimpse into the ordinary baptismal practices of the early Christian church.

Though it addresses many topics, the Didache says nothing about virtual reality baptisms. Since it predates the invention of virtual reality (VR) by nearly two millennia, it should come as no surprise that this ancient church manual is silent on the matter of an online church using virtual water to perform a baptism on an avatar. The Didache offers no guidance in the way of virtual baptisms, pixelated preachers, and online church.

This has not stopped some online churches from performing virtual reality baptisms. Syrmor, a popular YouTuber, has documented a virtual reality baptism for viewers to watch. The YouTube video, which Patricia Hernandez wrote about in an article for Polygon earlier this year, shows an online pastor performing the virtual baptism of an anime girl. The purpose of this video is neither satire nor sacrilege; rather, it shows viewers how this particular online pastor performs VR baptisms.

While the human participants wear Oculus Go headsets in their respective locations, the virtual baptism takes place in an online baptistry with an avatar pastor standing in digital water alongside the catechumen. The initiate—an anime girl avatar—has a floating name icon overhead with the handle “Drumsy,” indicating the username chosen by the person operating the VR headset.

The avatar pastor explains the theological significance of what will take place as other avatars—Tigger and Winnie the Pooh—stand alongside and listen. When it is time for the virtual baptism, the pastor instructs the human person with the VR headset to squat down so that the avatar goes under the digital water. While the avatar is immersed in virtual water, the pastor says, “Drumsy, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The rite concludes with clapping as one of the onlookers—a banana avatar—does a celebratory leap into the baptistry and a SpongeBob SquarePants avatar appears to soak up all the water.

Virtual reality baptisms, as well as online church in general, present many questions for Christian theologians and communities: Are virtual rites efficacious? Can an online church have meaningful community? Which Christian practices should or should not be done via the internet? How does technology shape the theology and practices of an online church?

Many people would consider a VR baptism to be an extreme manifestation of online church.
In his 2017 book Creating Church Online, Tim Hutchings reports that this rite is not widely practiced among the majority of churches online. Even Christian traditions that disagree on many other matters would readily agree that a virtual baptism without actual water is a misguided, if not heretical, practice. The practice of celebrating communion online is likewise problematic. The United Methodist Church has twice—once in 2010 and again in 2013—rejected the practice; the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations has also raised serious concerns about consecrating the elements of Holy Communion via digital media.

Less extreme manifestations of online church—a congregation livestreaming a worship service, for example, or a pastor devoting a portion of time to online engagement—raise subtler yet still challenging questions: Is it efficacious to pray with someone via Skype? How is the internet different from other technologies as a way to proclaim the gospel? Can a livestream worship service suffice for individuals who are disabled, sick, or otherwise cannot physically attend a worship service? Is it necessary for the online church to lead people to the local church? (While the term “local” church is not ideal, it does help us compare these two types of communities; the online church is geographically unconstrained, whereas the local church is geographically located.) These questions are harder to answer, less likely to generate consensus, and, frankly, more important at this time for church leaders and other dedicated Christians to consider as local churches navigate the liminal space between online church and local church.

Exploring the history of the online church movement and looking at one specific example of an actual church engaging in worship and pastoral care online can provide insight into where churches find themselves today. Distinguishing what separates the local church from the online church has become increasingly difficult.

**Blurred Boundaries: Online Church History**

Churches have always been networked. The apostle Paul, in the middle of the first century, actively linked Christian communities together into a regional web of relations:

> Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. (1 Corinthians 16:1-3)

While Christianity has a long history of being linked in a common mission and ministry, the digital hyperlinking of churches is a far more recent phenomenon. The ephemeral nature of the internet makes it difficult to pinpoint an exact beginning for the online church. However, scholars have marked a particular moment as one of the earliest occurrences of this phenomenon. Heidi Campbell, in her book When Religion Meets New Media, cites a definitive event in the origin of the online church:

> In 1986 a memorial service was conducted online in remembrance of the U.S. space shuttle Challenger, which exploded soon after takeoff. Organized on the Unison network BBS, the memorial involved a liturgy of Christian prayers, scripture, and meditations followed by an online ‘coffee hour’ designed to allow individuals to post reactions to the tragedy (Campbell, 35).
Tim Hutchings documents several other early forms of online church: an unnamed online church mentioned in a Church of England publication in 1985; a virtual church known as “The Order of the Holy Walnut” in the multiplayer computer game Habitat (1986-1988); and a “Cyber Church” that existed on a bulletin board software system in 1989 (Hutchings, 10-11). Relatively little is known about the origins and practices of these earliest online churches.

The invention of the World Wide Web in 1990 led to more online churches. The First Church of Cyberspace, launched in 1994 by a Presbyterian minister named Charles Henderson, is among the earliest of these web-based churches (Hutchings, 12). This online congregation offered discussion forums, chatrooms, online worship services, images, music, and a multimedia online Bible.

The early online church was not strictly a North American phenomenon. In the mid-1990s, Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea began using the internet to broadcast live services. The German-language journal Praktische Theologie (Practical Theology) published special issues in 1990 and 1996 about the internet and Christian churches. The 1996 issue included an interview with Melanie Graffam-Minkus, Germany’s first Online-Pfarrerin (online pastor). In the interview, Graffam-Minkus describes her role as being an initial pastoral contact for people with the ultimate goal being to connect people to a local pastor (Hutchings, 12-13).

In the 2000s, online churches grew in both number and notoriety. Arne Fjeldstad, as an extension of his Doctor of Ministry dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminary, compiled a website with links to thirty-four “cyberchurches” that were active in March of 2000. Fjeldstad described these early cyberchurches as being either an online extension of a local congregation or an exclusively internet-based community: “a cyberchurch can be a ministry of a ‘real’ local church or denomination, or a personal and/or independent initiative with no formal connection whatsoever to an established church or denomination.”

A pivotal moment for the online church came in 2004, when two noteworthy online churches—Church of Fools and I-church—were launched in the United Kingdom. These online churches, funded by the Methodist Council of Great Britain and the Church of England’s Oxford Diocese respectively, garnered extensive media coverage. This media coverage drove the number of daily website visitors into the tens of thousands (Hutchings, 18). Also during 2004, online churches were planted in the virtual world of Second Life.

Second Life players can socialize with others in virtual homes, stores, restaurants, and outdoor spaces. As Second Life grew in popularity, virtual churches began to form and offer worship services and Bible studies.

Second Life. Within this virtual world, Second Life players can socialize with others in virtual homes, stores, restaurants, and outdoor spaces. As Second Life grew in popularity, virtual churches began to form and offer worship services and Bible studies. In their 2014 research on Second Life published in the Nordic Journal of Religion and Society, Stefan Gelfgren and Tim Hutchings identified 114 sims (areas of virtual land) “advertising some form of gathered worship, representing a wide range of ideologies.” Some of the earliest Second Life churches—such as The Anglican Cathedral of Second Life, which was formed by an Anglican priest in 2006—remain open today.
The steady increase in the number of online churches prompted several notable reports and research projects. The Barna Group released an ominous report in 1998 titled “The Cyberchurch Is Coming,” which predicted that by 2010 “we will probably have 10 percent to 20 percent of the population relying primarily or exclusively upon the internet for religious input.” Barna released a similar report in 2001 claiming that millions of people would “drop out of the physical church in favor of the cyberchurch.” In 2002, the Vatican report *The Church and Internet* explored the possible ways in which the internet could augment religious life; however, it unequivocally declared that the internet cannot be a substitute for offline community, sacraments, preaching, and embodied experience.

Along with these reports, scholars of sociology, religious studies, communications, theology, and other disciplines have researched and written about online churches. Scholarly discourse has tended to focus on the relationship between online and offline church, the legitimacy of online community, the practice of online ritual, and sacred space on the internet.

 Scholarly discourse has tended to focus on the relationship between online and offline church, the legitimacy of online community, the practice of online ritual, and sacred space on the internet; however, it unequivocally declared that the internet cannot be a substitute for offline community, sacraments, preaching, and embodied experience.

From the mid-2000s to the present, the practice of a local church having an “internet campus” has become widespread. An internet campus often involves a local congregation livestreaming a worship service so that individuals can watch, discuss, and interact with the content online. According to Hutchings, this has resulted in “shifting online churches from a niche curiosity to something much closer to becoming a mainstream religious practice” (Hutchings, 20).

The history of the online church reveals a persistent uncertainty about the relationship between the online church and the local church. Even this brief sketch of the history of the online church reveals how the online church and local church are deeply intertwined: Pastors of local churches have ended up doing ministry in virtual churches, and pastors doing ministry with an online church have encouraged people to meet with a local pastor. Religious institutions with an extensive brick-and-mortar presence have funded entirely web-based endeavors. Local congregations gather in a building but also livestream worship services so that people in other countries can watch, pray, sing, and comment. History does not reveal clear boundaries delineating the local church from the online church.

Online church scholars are equally unsettled on this topic. Some see the online church as competing with the local church; that is to say, the online church will slowly replace the local church because of its more capacious affordances. Other scholars argue that the online church supplements the local church; rather than replacing the local church, the online church can be a way to augment or expand the work of the local church. Some scholars have seen the online church as a way to attract new people who might be unreached by the local church; the online church is a form of evangelism that can extend the Christian mission (Campbell, 138-139). Lastly, some scholars have suggested that the online church will radically reorder traditional beliefs and ultimately result in a new form of religion. These competing views, like the multifaceted history of the online church, suggest that the lines separating the local church and the online church are anything but clear.

**St. John Lutheran Church: An Ethnographic Study of Online Church**

Ethnography offers a way to humanize the study of online churches. While historical overviews and scholarly discourse may provide context and concepts, ethnography provides real people, places, and practices. In their book *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen argue that the discipline of theology has increasingly turned to ethnography as a tool for meaning-
making. Historical and theoretical discourse tend toward broad views and sweeping claims; ethnography, on the other hand, prioritizes the particular: "Ethnography is a way to take particularity seriously—to discover truth revealed through embodied habits, relations, practices, narratives, and struggles" (Scharen and Vigen, XXI). A thorough exploration of online churches, therefore, requires some ethnographic research.

The following abbreviated ethnographic study of an online church is necessarily limited, but it provides texture and flesh-and-blood examples. It also illustrates the blurred boundaries between the local church and the online church. (As is common in ethnographies, the names—of this congregation, pastors, people—have been changed.)

At St. John Lutheran Church, they do not wear Oculus Go headsets or perform virtual baptisms. Rather, they eat sticky buns and drink coffee before worship begins. At 10:45 on a Sunday morning, just before the worship service starts, people are still logging on. Pastor Mike, the online pastor at St. John, types a question into a chat box on the webpage: “Do you enjoy a special breakfast food while attending Church Online? I have a sticky bun this morning!”

Online church participants “enter” the church by going to St. John’s website. The home page displays “Church Online” at the top of the webpage. This top banner also includes the church logo, links to various social media platforms, and hyperlinks to other pages. One of the links leads to an “About Us” page with information about St. John’s beliefs, history, ministries, and a way to “Plan Your Visit.” The content in this section of the website pertains to the local congregation located in a suburb of Denver.

Online participants click on the “Church Online” page. The top of this page has specific options related to church online functions: links to sign up for text messages, fill out a digital connect card, join the Facebook group, or seek assistance with technical issues. Below this is text that reads, “Connecting the Church Locally and Around the World.” While the online church page is always accessible, the format changes when St. John has a local worship service. At those times, a chat feature and live video feed of the worship service appear on the webpage.

At St. John Lutheran Church, they do not wear Oculus Go headsets or perform virtual baptisms. Rather, they eat sticky buns and drink coffee before worship begins.

Participants enter the online church and create a username: @Kay, @Rileyfam, @SNF, @deloresjean. Pastor Mike has a special identifier next to his username which indicates that he is the “Online Pastor.” He begins by personally welcoming each person on the chat (“Welcome @fred and @Barry07”). Some, but not all, of the participants reciprocate Pastor Mike’s personal greeting. Some individuals in the chatroom indicate where they are or what they doing: “Driving from Fort Collins.” All of this is happening as the opening worship songs are being sung on the video screen adjacent to the chat box.

As the service begins, Pastor Mike makes some announcements about upcoming Easter services and encourages the congregants to invite someone to service. He does not specifically tell people which service—the local worship service or the online church service—they should invite people to attend. His request covers both options.

Individuals continue to enter the chatroom. Pastor Mike welcomes each person by their username as someone comments about recent church events:

@Otto: Thankful for a beautiful day yesterday for the Men’s Event
@PastorMike: It sure was @Otto. Praise God for the wonderful day!

The comment by @Otto refers to a men’s ministry event that was held at St. John’s local campus the previous day. Although Otto and Pastor Mike are conversing with one another through the
online church platform, they were face-to-face the day before at this men's ministry event.

After a time of pleasantries and announcements, the conversation within the chatroom shifts to what is happening in the local worship service. As the Scripture reading is happening on the worship video, Pastor Mike types a summary of the reading: "@PastorMike: The reckless love of God, that even while I'm still a sinner, Christ died for me. Romans 5:8." Participants make frequent use of emojis.

During the announcements portion of the local church service, Pastor Mike invites people to attend an upcoming event: "@PastorMike: If you're in the Denver area, I'd love to see you at this event." This invitation reveals how some St. John's online church attendees also attend worship and special events at the church's local campus.

During the sermon, as with other parts of the worship service, the conversation in the chatroom focuses on the content of the preaching. St. John's senior pastor preaches the sermon while online church participants quote or expound on the content of the sermon:

@PastorMike: It sure is easy to fall into worry about things we can't do anything about.
@Curtis: Don't think about what happened yesterday, or worry about tomorrow, live each day. Each day is a blessing from God!
@PastorMike: It sure is, @Curtis

Finally, as the sermon concludes and the service draws to a close, the individuals in the chatroom offer up general comments and pleasantries. People say goodbye to one another, offer blessings on the week ahead, and share reflections on the service and message. Pastor Mike concludes with a very brief summation of the sermon and offers a link to more information about upcoming Easter services as people begin to exit the church by logging off.

**Pastor Mike, Online Pastor**

Mike never set out to be an online church pastor. In fact, he had not originally even set out to be a pastor. Mike majored in psychology and marketing in college, but he began to consider attending seminary in 2015: "People were continuously telling me that I would make a good pastor one day," he said during a 2019 interview.

While he was considering seminary, the pastor at St. John Lutheran Church contacted Mike to see if he might be interested in serving on the church's staff. The church was working on a new project—planting an online church—and they needed someone with technical knowledge to make it work. This invitation interested Mike but he did not really know what online church planting entailed. To further complicate the matter, Mike saw more barriers than opportunities: "It [online church] wasn't something that I would have dreamed of or thought about...I thought there were so many impossibilities with church online."

Three years later, Mike has a very different view of online churches. Where he once saw impossibilities, he now sees possibilities: "I see God doing some amazing stuff with how people are connecting and the intentionality of ministering online." He is now Pastor Mike, the online pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church. As online campus pastor, Mike is expected to lead and develop the online presence of St. John Lutheran Church; this includes managing the information, resources, and online community of St. John's Online Campus.

According to the online campus pastor job description, Mike's work is to be both local and non-local:
"OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES: You're not only a pastor to the internet, you're a pastor. This includes being able to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, care for the sick, perform funerals, officiate weddings, provide counseling as needed, etc."

Despite being an online church pastor, Mike has many responsibilities within the local parish. He divides his time and energy between online pastoral ministry (a quarter of his time) and serving as the congregation's communications coordinator (three-quarters of his time): "Being an online pastor tends to be more like a part-time job while being a communications coordinator is my full time job here. So it's kind of like being bi-vocational." As communications coordinator, Mike manages web communication and social media, distributes sermon messages, and assists with printed communication.

Many of the interactions that Mike has as a pastor are digitally mediated. However, these interactions can have an impact on the local church. For example, one young man who attends St. John's online church was previously active in his local congregation. During his teens, however, he stopped attending worship. He came across the online church and began to worship on a regular basis. "He started connecting with us online and really started to enjoy it and he was starting to get invested in church again," Mike said. As this young man began to engage in the online church, it influenced his relationship with the local church: "He loved it so much that he started attending his dad's congregation and helping out," Mike said, noting that the online church led this young man back to the local church.

Pastor Mike understands this story as indicative of how the online church relates to the local church: "This is a guy who was falling away from the church...God is moving in his heart and I don't know if that would have happened without that initial first step online."

Pastor Mike—a pastor shepherding an online church—interacts with people through unseen wireless radio waves. He splits his time between a local church and an online church. He takes a sermon preached in a brick-and-mortar sanctuary, posts it online, and engages in digital discussions with people as they sit in brick-and-mortar living rooms, coffee shops, and libraries. It is hard to separate which parts of his work are local or non-local, online or offline.

Does an online church become a local church if it meets offline for worship? What if an individual divides time between a church's online campus and local campus? Is one more important or more "real" than the other?

The differences between a virtual reality baptism and a baptism at a local church are obvious. It is not difficult to find the ways in which these practices differ. The liminal space between the online church and the local church, however, is much harder to differentiate.

The space between online church and local church is fraught with questions: Has a local church changed into something different when it begins to broadcast its worship services on Facebook Live? Does posting teaching videos to a website turn a local church into an online church? Is a pastor an online pastor through the daily use of email, social media messaging, and internet-based preaching resources? The questions can also flow the other way as well: Does an online church become a local church if it meets offline for worship? What if an individual divides time between a church's online campus and local campus? Is one more important or more "real" than the other?

These questions reveal how a sharp delineation between online church and local church is no longer tenable. Peter Fischer-Nielsen and Stefan Gelfgren, in the concluding chapter of Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures, argue that the conversation should be framed in a new way: "Instead of treating church and digital media as an isolated
field, the research must move in the direction of doing broader research on church in a digital age” (Cheong, Fischer-Nielsen, Gelfgren, and Ess, 294). While there may have been a time when the online church and the local church were very different entities, the spread of the internet into every nook and cranny of life is making this distinction hard to maintain. “Even if the digital religious opportunities continue to be nothing but a supplement to the Sunday service and social life of the local community, they will have an influence that must be observed” (Cheong, Fischer-Nielsen, Gelfgren, and Ess, 299).

When a church has an ethernet cord running in its building, it is part of the church in a digital age. When worshippers carry internet-connected devices into the sanctuary, then that congregation is part of the church in a digital age. When a church creates a Facebook page, it is part of the church in a digital age. While countless questions about online church practices and theology surely remain, one question that we can answer with confidence is that the vast majority of our local churches have indeed passed through the liminal space and officially belong to the church in the digital age.†


Works Cited


FOLLOW MIST

Even though I know it disappears,
I am compelled to follow mist
and walk across the morning town,
and watch clouds lift as the edge
of tree-lines harden. Like a dove
exploding from her cover,
power lines pursue wide paragraphs
but then dwindle, clarifying in flight
but coming to the last house and dunes.

This is how I write a poem for you.
I sit astride the highest drying bluffs
with my expanse of white thought
(as if I'd brought the sheets with me)
to look on the horizon's fresh frown
and hear the waves' gray melody
improvising on the ocean's cello.

My theme might be the end—
where a vault door opens,
a slow vault after all to a room
in which your sudden hand within
stops a vase from falling.

What smart things to say to you,
O savior of a vase? What odd praise?
You are the lieutenant of a dove,
the good tourist of an old library,
rearranging my night thoughts
like all the morning newspapers
thrown already on every lawn
back toward the waking town
and then the simple breakfast.

John Poch
Ending Badly
Jim Jarmusch’s The Dead Don’t Die

Charles Andrews

George A. Romero’s 1968 film Night of the Living Dead is the gory fountainhead from which springs all of our modern zombie pop culture. There were prior films of note, such as Victor Halperin’s White Zombie (1932) and Jacques Tourner’s I Walked With A Zombie (1943), but it was Romero who gave us the now canonical tropes. Romero's zombies shamble slowly, crave human flesh, can only be stopped with a shot to the head, arise for unknown reasons, and repeat patterns from their former lives. (The arch joke of Romero’s 1978 sequel, Dawn of the Dead, is that zombies return to an abandoned shopping mall to roam the stores in a grotesque parody of their consumerism.) Without Romero, there would be no The Walking Dead, Shaun of the Dead, or World War Z. But Romero’s particular imprint—often followed less well by his successors—was to foreground a political agenda, mixing gore with allegory.

It is Romero’s politically charged, schlock horror mode that Jim Jarmusch embraces in his latest film, The Dead Don’t Die, a zombie comedy that takes aim at the Trump era. Its cast is a who’s who of indie film stars—“The Greatest Zombie Cast Ever Disassembled,” according to the movie’s poster—and many in the company are familiar faces from Jarmusch’s films. Our central characters are the three-person police force of Centerville, Pennsylvania, all played by Jarmusch alumni: Chief Cliff Robertson (Bill Murray), Officer Ronnie Peterson (Adam Driver), and Officer Mindy Morrison (Chloë Sevigny).

Centerville is a quaint, one-diner town that becomes terrorized by hordes of the undead. The town’s name, like much of the film, is self-consciously on-the-nose—it might as well have been called Middleamerica, U.S.A.—and the Pennsylvania setting is one of its many nods to Romero, whose life and career were built around Pittsburgh. The loads of self-referentiality combined with Jarmusch’s signature offbeat, deadpan humor have been among the reasons that The Dead Don’t Die has gotten a mixed critical reception, from its tepid opening night at Cannes onward. It’s the scrappiness of the film, though—which at times lumbers, lurches, and even falls apart like a zombie—that’s crucial to Jarmusch’s point. The film is a comedy laced with anger and despair at the state of our world, and its schlockiness contributes greatly to its nervous, desperate humor.

In Jarmusch’s long tenure as a leading figure of American independent cinema, beginning with his landmark first films Permanent Vacation (1980) and Stranger Than Paradise (1984), he carved out a niche as a pre-eminent chronicler of the mundane lives of quirky outsiders. In films like Mystery Train (1989), Broken Flowers (2005), and Paterson (2016), he celebrated underdogs and the rich, diverse communities that thrive throughout the United States outside the realms of power. The other significant strand in his body of work are his deconstructed genre films where he applies his same sensibility within a template set by Hollywood B-movies, such as his moody Western, Dead Man (1995); his mafia-Kurosawa-gangsta fusion, Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai (1999); the neo-noir crime thriller, The Limits of Control (2009); and his lyrical and romantic vampire film, Only Lovers Left Alive (2013). Both his realist and his genre films tenderly embrace the detritus of Americana—the music, movies, TV, and food that make a culture. The anger and despair at the center of The Dead Don’t Die seems to arise from a sense that cultural polarization and conflict are the prevailing attitudes of our time—a direct antithesis of all that
Jarmusch's art stands for.

In The Dead Don't Die, the ragged semblance of a plot begins with Hermit Bob (played with gusto by Tom Waits), an off-the-grid outsider who becomes our frame narrator. Bob is something of a stand-in for Jarmusch, operating like other lo-fi heroes in the Jarmusch canon such as Isacch De Bankole's drifter hitman in The Limits of Control and Tom Hiddleston's iPhone-resisting vampire in Only Lovers Left Alive. Bob explicitly voices many of the film's basic themes and messages, including its doom-laden final lines about the world going to hell.

A collection of random characters and unfinished plot arcs radiate through the film, which includes a trio of teenagers from the city, a horror-literate convenience store worker (Caleb Landry Jones) in a Nosferatu T-shirt, and a group of children imprisoned in a juvenile detention center. This last group, which deliberately evokes the Trump administration's child separation tactics along the border, is left painfully stranded in the narrative, where escaping from their prison into a world of zombies seems a meager victory.

The anti-Trump agenda is thick on the ground, nowhere more explicitly than in the character of Farmer Frank (Steve Buscemi), who wears a red baseball cap printed with the slogan “Keep America White Again.” More subtle than the hat is Jarmusch's framing of conversations in the Centerville town diner between Farmer Bob and his friend Hank Thompson (Danny Glover), a mixed race friendship maintained genially despite the unmentioned white supremacist headwear. The precise cause of the zombie outbreak, in good Romero fashion, is never named, but it is strongly implied that the current administration, U.S. cultural conflict, and environmental devastation have conspired to raise the dead in vengeance. And, as Adam Driver's character repeatedly reminds us: “This is all going to end badly.”

That bad end, which arrives for many of the “disassembled cast,” allows Jarmusch to decorate the plot with interesting actors in tiny roles. Standouts of this type include Rosie Perez, who appears as a newscaster with her name spoonerized to Posie Juarez. Carol Kane plays a chardonnay-soaked wino-zombie who might prefer booze to flesh. And, in the most substantial and bizarre minor part in the film, Tilda Swinton is Zelda Winston, another name created by garbling the actor's name. Winston is less of a character than a metastatic genre mash-up: a Scottish, samurai-sword-wielding, Zen-practicing mortician who seems to be part of another movie altogether. Many of these characters are only half-realized, and many critics have understandably focused on the irresolution of some plotlines. The jagged edges in the plot and character construction, however, contribute to the film's scrappy, thrown-together aesthetic.

The Centerville police's grappling with the outbreak of zombie-ism is the primary story line through the film, and Driver and Murray's interplay is one of the film's highlights, supplying a great deal of Jarmusch's characteristic off-kilter dialogue as well as meta-commentary that adds to the film's raggedy edges. The film's theme song, for instance, is by hip country musician Sturgill Simpson—a credit Driver announces to Murray as the song plays on a CD in their patrol car. Later, the reanimated corpse of Sturgill Simpson ambles past dragging a broken guitar. Driver is also the first to say aloud that he thinks a zombie crisis is underway, and when Murray challenges his repeated claim that all will “end badly,” Driver says he knows this for a fact because he has read the movie's script. Murray becomes exasperated because, he insists, he has “worked with Jim” longer than Driver has.

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These demolitions of the fourth wall have a sloppiness that is sometimes more tedious than clever, but the slapdash aesthetic lets The Dead Don't Die feel more like an authentic B-picture in the mode of Roger Corman/American International Pictures than like slicker-seeming grindhouse homages such as Robert Rodriguez's Planet Terror. And most of Romero's zombie films also pop with self-conscious allusions to the genre, such as when Shaun of the Dead creators Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg make a cameo in Romero's Land of the Dead (2005).

More interesting than Murray and Driver discussing Jarmusch, however, are the many ways in which The Dead Don't Die alludes to—indeed, cannibalizes—Jarmusch's earlier works. The first reanimated corpses to claw out of their graves in search of living flesh are a couple played by Sara Driver (no relation to Adam), who has appeared in several Jarmusch films, and Iggy Pop, who was the subject of Jarmusch's documentary, Gimme Danger (2016). The couple stalk Centerville's diner, moaning "Coffee!!" which they guzzle in an echo of their former lives and in a zombified version of the vignettes in Jarmusch's omnibus film Coffee and Cigarettes (2003). Wu-Tang Clan's RZA, who has worked with Jarmusch since the 1990s, appears as a deliveryman wearing a brown uniform with a gold "WU-PS" logo. And there are deeper cuts, such as Tilda Swinton's kimono and hairstyle that mirror the woman at the center of Jarmusch's video for Talking Heads' "The Lady Don't Mind." These references and recyclings are part of the movie's charm, and they contribute to its central themes of exhaustion, annihilation, and end times.

Romero openly acknowledged that Night of the Living Dead was about the political despair at the end of the 1960s, and The Dead Don't Die seems like a step further—despair at the end of the American project. The Dead Don't Die will not likely be seen as a top-tier Jarmusch film, or even a top-tier zombie comedy, which might make it a work for completists only. But it has value as a smaller, crankier companion to the great political horror comedy of this year, Jordan Peele's Us. In both films, there is a sense that we are in an age of reckoning for a culture that is unsustainable. Ending badly is Jarmusch's verdict. Everything is coming to a bad end, and there is nothing new under the sun—but in his latest film, it is clear that Jarmusch is still hanging out in the wreckage with a few of his favorite things.

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The Extraordinary Ordinary
Philip Kolin’s Reaching Forever

Luci Shaw

Here is a remarkable collection of new poems, each one starting out within the finite world but extending itself in metaphor and rich verbiage toward the infinite, the eternal. The book’s cover shows a human figure holding up a star as if ready to launch it into space. Likewise, the poet seems to be standing on some sort of beach, a margin where land, sea, and air join in a changeable boundary that represents the fluidities of existence on this God-ordained planet.

This has been Philip Kolin’s lifelong attitude as a poet-Christian — firmly grounded in the realities of human existence but open to infinite possibilities that celebrate the transcendent, the miraculous. A distinguished professor of English (emeritus) at the University of Southern Mississippi, Kolin uses verses like searchlights, picking up images from a dark sky and illuminating them for us. He writes about the “extraordinary ordinary,” events and relationships that might seem insignificant upon first glance but that burst into life from the words on the page.

Reading poems like “Breaking Bread with the Gulls,” I love how he describes his Maundy Thursday, by telling us, “bread is theology” and the birds, mendicants. He says, “I am called to feed these birds, / to be their host”—note the word “host,” the human equivalent of the presence of God in the Host—and the gulls “harvest the air with wings.” A minute later three little girls show up and he gives each a slice. “They break it into wafer-size/pieces for the birds to snatch up” thus celebrating a beach Eucharist, mirroring the acts of a generous God, and concluding, “There’s no inflation in God’s economy.” The mystery of divine provision is grounded in a chance encounter that shows the grace of God’s frugality.

In the poem “January on the Gulf of Mexico,” the beach is populated with pigeons and pelicans, but more importantly, the images that catch our attention are the varieties of human appearance: “a blind man with dark glasses,” an army veteran with “a brisk mustache and hair like sleet” reflecting on his “stainless steel life,” a tattooed teen, and women sharing secrets about their dead husbands. Words resonate, vowels and consonants rub together with an almost electric energy.

But the poems are far more than skillful, spirited verbiage. The images challenge the insignificant upon first glance but that burst into life from the words on the page.

Again and again the gift of contrast is evident—
distinctions made clear, essential differences revealed. Kolin writes from real life—humanity experienced with warmth, vitality, conviction, and the authenticity of personal experience. He has lived his poetry. Throughout this volume he shows the effectiveness of economy, saying no more than is necessary to describe an event or scene, allowing the imagination of the reader to summon a mental image, in itself a creative act. In the poem “A Simple Ten-minute Procedure,” he imagines an aborted infant having only “memories of forceps / cradling him down / a sterile sink.” The word “sterile” is significant, a reference to the tragedy of a human life cut short.

He has lived his poetry. Throughout this volume he shows the effectiveness of economy, saying no more than is necessary to describe an event or scene, allowing the imagination of the reader to summon a mental image, in itself a creative act.

A keen observer of the varieties of the human condition, Kolin projects verbal photographs in a poem titled “The River Burial,” on a Mississippi river baptism: “sinners in cotton whites,” “a young mother, her womb full,” whose tears “will further salt the wetlands.” The trouble is, though the preacher “rinses wrath and lust out of each of the convicted,” the “submerged sins keep coming back to shore.” The economy of these descriptions adds to their effective power.

In “Old Men at Funerals,” he enters the imaginations of the ancients who fear “too much light, too much darkness, / then the silence of dirt.” And for them, “Heaven was always a comforting thought...but not today when it creaks close on pallbearer wheels and crinkling crepe” as the departed are hauled in “a bronzed box car/towards a frightening eternity.”

These authentic poems all spring from a storehouse of personal experience, human wisdom, insight, and a profound penetration into Scripture. With each turn of a page I’m nudged and then launched headlong into new understandings. It is like opening a window so that the three-dimensional life of the spirit opens up—a varied and lovely landscape of both lights and shadows, colors and contrasts. We need these insights, caught up as we are with the mundane, the time-bound quotidian. Philip Kolin “reaches forever,” and carries us with him.

Speaking of God, the poet tells us: “He lives in infinity, and his voice is / an octave higher than silence. / His words thrum.// He speaks in endless vowels.”

Luci Shaw was born in London in 1928 and has been writer-in-residence at Regent College in Vancouver since 1986. Author of nearly forty books of poetry and creative nonfiction, she received the 2013 Denise Levertov Award for Creative Writing from Seattle Pacific University. Her collection The Generosity will be released by Paraclete Press in 2020. Visit lucishaw.com for more information.
The Radical Potential of Aretha Franklin’s Amazing Grace
Josh Langhoff

WATCHING AMAZING GRACE, the Aretha Franklin concert film released earlier this year, is like opening the door to a secret laboratory. We see Franklin, then twenty-nine years old, singing in the musical testing ground she’d known since birth, a church full of people. At the piano is the Rev. James Cleveland, the gospel innovator whose heavily-chorded piano style Franklin had learned sitting beside him in her childhood living room. In front of the piano sit the two greatest influences on her singing style: her father, the celebrated Baptist minister C.L. Franklin, and his romantic companion, the gospel diva Clara Ward. The choir’s arrangements are as crisp as their sparkling vests. The New York session pros in Franklin’s band lock into every groove their boss gives them. And for two nights, the boss and her once-in-a-generation voice reveal to the wider world a teeming religious subculture, one whose elements and experiments had made Franklin’s music a defining sound of the late sixties.

When she recorded her gospel music concert in January of 1972, Franklin had reached the peak of her vocal and hitmaking powers—which is to say, she was better at being a pop star than anyone else in the world. For Atlantic Records, she’d scored top-ten hits with originals (“Think,” “Rock Steady”) and definitive versions of other people’s songs (Otis Redding’s “Respect,” Burt Bacharach and Hal David’s “I Say a Little Prayer”). Her voice was such a natural phenomenon that she had to treat her band members like unicyclists at the Grand Canyon, warning them not to pay attention to her lest they lose focus and crash. Beyond that, she was a master technician who ran rehearsals and often dictated song arrangements to her bands. These contributions went largely uncredited. Amazing Grace was the first album to list her as a producer. Accounts differ over who had the idea for an Aretha gospel album—producer Jerry Wexler and Franklin herself have both taken credit—but everyone agreed it was a good idea, and that they should record the album live before a church audience. They wound up at New Temple Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles, backed by James Cleveland’s Southern California Community Choir and documented by Sydney Pollack’s film crew. The resulting double album was spectacular.

Don’t just take my word for it. Marvin Gaye once called it “Aretha’s singular masterpiece.” “Aretha has been working on this album all her life,” Phyl Garland wrote in Ebony in 1972, “for it is the consummation of the fundamental musical forces that have shaped her as an artist. In short, it is nothing less than amazing.” Gospel music expert Anthony Heilbut applauded Franklin’s choice of Cleveland and his choir: “Here was a marriage made in heaven, absolute proof that the best gospel musicians remain uniquely attuned to the singers they accompany.”

“[T]hough it might sound like hyperbole,”
Wexler told Franklin's biographer David Ritz, *Amazing Grace* "relates to religious music in much the same way Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel relates to religious art. In terms of scope and depth, little else compares to its greatness."

Wexler may be biased because he co-produced this particular Sistine Chapel, but he makes a good point. The *Amazing Grace* program is great because it encompasses worlds. Franklin's expansive vision of gospel recalls the radical egalitarianism of Paul's early letters. In Franklin's gospel there is no longer sacred or secular, traditional or modern. She embraces both her father's Baptist tradition and the wilder two-steps of her Pentecostal brethren, those sanctified believers her drummer Bernard Purdie called the "holy-rolly church." Her music suggests gospel music is a well without a bottom.

Compared to the subtly overdubbed and reordered album, the movie is rough around the edges. During filming, Pollack and his crew famously forgot to clap the clapperboard, so image and sound remained unsynchronized until 2010. Even then, Franklin blocked the film's release; her estate finally approved it after her death. Many of the crowd shots lack sound, leading to the weird spectacle of audience members silently shouting or clapping out complicated patterns we can't hear. Worse, the DVD release lacks any bonus features at all. Who knows what footage is still out there? After watching the film's sole rehearsal scene, with Franklin and the band tersely working out the intro to "How I Got Over," it's impossible not to want more. And why, in "Mary Don't You Weep," did the restoration team omit the crucial minute where Franklin calls forth Lazarus from the giddiest point of her high range, working the crowd into a resurrection frenzy?

Still, the eighty-nine minutes we see are remarkable. At the center is Franklin's technically stunning singing, always passionate but never forced. Her husky low notes sound warm and inviting, like cushions; her high notes whoosh as though she's unburdening herself and her listeners of weights so old that they'd simply faded into life's background. Plenty of singers in the 1970s made singing sound easy, but Franklin's ease inhabits a different universe than that of Karen Carpenter, Bill Withers, or James Taylor. She
applies her ease to performances of spellbinding virtuosity.

In particular, the evenings’ closing songs come across better on film than they do on record, because we see the iron hold Franklin had on her audiences. Her meditative, meterless renditions of “Amazing Grace” and “Never Grow Old,” sung in the “free” style pioneered in the 1930s by Willie Mae Ford Smith, render her audience tearful and breathless. Franklin spends around ten minutes getting through two and a half verses of “Amazing Grace,” and she uses every second. The first verse announces the song with a straightforward technique: She holds a syllable (“waaaaaaaaaaaaaaas”) to its breaking point, eliciting murmurs and applause, then repeats the word with the syllable that follows (“was lost”), allowing everyone to sigh with relief. The verse becomes sixteen long bars of tension and release. By the time she reaches the second, more elaborately improvised verse, the church is quivering like an exposed nerve. The smallest unexpected nuances spark chuckles of appreciation; the syncopated jolt of “It was! It was! It was! It was! It was grace” drives people to their feet.

This singing style was older than Franklin, but it was also, in its own cloistered and churchy way, ahead of its time. Writing a year before the Amazing Grace album was released, Heilbut pointed out that “Willie Mae could easily get a two-hour concert out of ten songs, many years before John Coltrane popularized the fifteen-minute solo.” Indeed, Franklin’s versions of “Amazing Grace” and “Never Grow Old” are stretched to the point of abstraction. They seem to allow Franklin unmediated communion with her listeners. When Franklin died in 2018, the critic Greg Tate compared her to jazz masters Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, writing that she “was free with her harmonic and melodic feelings in ways we typically refer to as avant-garde.”

On those rare occasions they received negative press, Franklin and Coleman even riled their detractors in similar ways. Forced to assess Franklin’s recordings of standards for Hi Fi/Stereo Review in 1967, an irate Rex Reed complained, “It always occurs to me that there must be a better way, a way that will preserve the song from destruction and leave the listener with a portion of his sanity. Her delivery overpowers all meaning, all semblance of order and dignity.” Similarly, Downbeat magazine’s John A. Tynan initially dismissed Coleman’s landmark album Free Jazz as a “maelstrom.” After asking the unanswerable question, “Where does neurosis end and psychosis begin?” he concluded that Coleman and his fellow musicians must have conspired “to destroy the music that gave them birth.” Some enterprising copywriter should have worked these critiques into an ad. “Ornette and Aretha: Dead-set on destruction, and driving listeners INSANE!”

Throughout the film, we see Franklin test the extent of her command over instrument and audience. She summons all the dangers, toils, and snares of the past, along with all the promise of her heavenly home, and ushers them into the room for all to see. Chronological time becomes irrelevant. This immediacy drives people to cry, laugh, and dance. During the last song, Clara Ward’s mother Gertrude kicks up a holy ruckus, stomping over to the piano from the other side of the sanctuary and gesticulating wildly before being restrained.

Watching such raw displays of emotion might make outsiders feel like voyeurs. The concert audience was mostly parishioners who’d grown up worshiping in the gospel church, but the second night saw some curious—and famous—guests from beyond New Temple’s walls. Amazing Grace is the rare movie to make Mick Jagger seem like a hapless everyman. At several points the camera catches him in the audience, grooving eagerly and trying to get Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts to clap along. The Stones knew gospel and presum-
ably loved it—Jagger had occasionally attended church with gospel keyboardist Billy Preston—but they were keenly aware that it wasn’t their music. In choruses like their asocial call-and-response, “Hey! (Hey!) You! (You!) Get off of my cloud,”

Throughout the film, we see Franklin test the extent of her command over instrument and audience. She summons all the dangers, toils, and snares of the past, along with all the promise of her heavenly home, and ushers them into the room for all to see.

they’d twisted the techniques of African-American musicians beyond their original concerns. (Singing along to “Get Off of My Cloud,” the critic Frank Kogan writes, “the audience is participating in its own rejection, if it wants...being empowered and unified in self-division and self-destruction.”)

For better or worse, most pop and rock fans still know gospel music not as an innovative, self-sufficient art, nor as a devotional medium, but as source material for the music they really love.

Amazing Grace answers that concern with a beautiful “Yes, and...” Yes, gospel singers did inspire the early rock’n’rollers, and yes, many of them openly yearned to cross over and earn bigger pay days. For every Willie Mae Ford Smith decrying secular fame—“juggle the letters around and you got rats instead of stars,” she told Heilbut—there was a Sam Cooke, transforming pop radio with gospel melisma and harmonies, or a Sister Rosetta Tharpe, straddling both genres her entire life. Franklin’s omnivorous talent and ambition placed her in the second camp. Some of her father’s flock were suspicious of her worldly success, but during his brief concert remarks, Rev. Franklin assured the assembly, “If you want to know the truth, she has never left the church.”

She dragged the church onto the radio and the radio back into the church, opening the first night with Marvin Gaye’s “Wholy Holy,” then smooshing together “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” with Carole King’s “You’ve Got a Friend” in what fans of the TV show Glee would call a mashup.

When Billy Preston discussed the album with David Ritz, he was struck by how Franklin “anticipates modern gospel.” The sound of this concert—“a funky R-and-B rhythm section and razor sharp choir”—would come to define the modern gospel of stars like Kirk Franklin and Fred Hammond. Preston concluded, “It’s really a radical record.” The film backs up Preston’s claim and lets Aretha Franklin’s fans see exactly what her radicalness looked like.

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Works Cited


The Chains of St. Margaret’s

Susan VanZanten

Perched next to stately Westminster Abbey—site of coronations, royal weddings, and funerals for hundreds of years—sits her humble little sister, the Church of St. Margaret. While Westminster Abbey is “the Queen’s Church,” St. Margaret’s is the church of the House of Commons. Sometimes called “the church on Parliament Square,” it stands across from the gilded gates of the Houses of Parliament, where police constable Keith Palmer was stabbed to death in a terrorist attack in 2017. Flowers, cards, and balloons still mark the spot daily. Members of Parliament have only to cross a busy street and fight their way through throngs of tourists and Brexit protestors to enter the quiet repose of their parish away from home. On the morning of June 2, 2019, I attended the Sung Eucharist at St. Margaret’s and thought about chains.

My friend Fiona, an Anglican priest who leads an innovative multifaith ministry at the financial hub of Canary Wharf, was preaching that morning. After I was seated, I found attached to the pew before me a slightly shabby red kneeling cushion with a striking portcullis motif embroidered in gold. The portcullis is the symbol of the House of Commons, and, as depicted at St. Margaret’s, includes two chains on either side of the gate that were used to raise or lower the portcullis quickly in times of attack. The kneeling cushion was connected to a bronze chain that was bolted firmly to the pew. Although the chain extended far enough for the cushion to reach the floor, it could not be moved far from its anchor. Were these well-worn cushions antiques, so valuable that the church feared that a brash American home decorator might decide to repurpose them? Or were the parish authorities worried that a homeless person might appropriate one to serve as a pillow for a weary head? The Order of Service that morning, after all, did recommend taking one’s handbag to the altar during the Eucharist to prevent theft.

St. Margaret’s was originally built in the late eleventh century to provide the Benedictine monks in residence at Westminster Abbey with some peace and quiet as they sang the Divine Office. Apparently, the common tradesmen and farmers of Westminster who attended daily Mass were disruptive, so the monks built a smaller church for the locals next to the grand Abbey edifice. By the end of the fifteenth century, St. Margaret’s was so dilapidated that it required almost a complete reconstruction. Additional restorations occurred during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, but today’s building is substantially the same as the one consecrated in 1523.

With Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries in 1540, Westminster Abbey became a cathedral church, and in 1614, St. Margaret’s was declared the parish church of the Parliament because the then-influential Puritans found the
liturgical worship of the Abbey excessively ornate. Since 1681, the front pew across from the lectern has been reserved for the Speaker of the House of Commons. John Milton, the great Puritan poet and civil servant, was a parishioner at St. Margaret’s and married and buried his second wife there. A Victorian stained glass window in the north aisle, donated by an American admirer, depicts scenes from Milton’s life and poetry. Winston Churchill was married at St. Margaret’s, and at the conclusion of World War II he brought the entire House of Commons there for a thanksgiving service.

Among the many monuments—including the tomb of Sir Walter Raleigh and a charming memorial to Queen Elizabeth I’s nursemaid—the one I found the most moving was a simple white marble oval plaque dedicated to Olaudah Equiano, placed near the font. One of the first Africans to chronicle his life in the chains of slavery, Equiano’s 1789 memoir (The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vasa, the African) powerfully depicts the barbarity of the slave trade. Equiano was captured in Africa at the age of eleven and subsequently was sold numerous times both in England and America. When he converted to Christianity in 1759, his “owner” permitted him to be baptized at St. Margaret’s under his slave name: Gustavus Vasa. Like another well-known former slave, Frederick Douglass, Equiano scraped together an education to free his mind from the chains of ignorance, learning to read and write with the help of British sailors. Assisted by a Quaker “owner,” he eventually made enough money to buy his freedom in 1768. Equiano’s influential memoir and stirring speeches for a black abolitionist group played an important role in the eventual ending of the slave trade in Britain in 1820.

More slaves and chains showed up in the scripture reading that morning, which was from Acts 16. Paul and Silas are in Philippi being stalked by a slave girl with a spirit of divination, who earns a good profit for her “owners” with her fortune-telling skills. “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation,” she shouts on the streets. This goes on for days until Paul, “very much annoyed,” turns back and orders the spirit to leave her. Her displeased “owners,” deprived of their ill-begotten income, bring the two apostles before the authorities, who have them flogged, thrown into prison, and put in stocks. At midnight, Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns when a violent earthquake shakes the prison, “and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened.” The jailer prepares to kill himself because he assumes that the prisoners have fled, but Paul reassures him that they are still there. Convicted of God’s power and mercy, the jailer believes, and he and his household are baptized. He takes Paul and Silas into his home, washes their wounds, and gives them food. God’s power, manifested in nature, unfastens the prisoners’ manacles, but the chains of violence and hunger experienced by the apostles are sundered by the believing jailer. Paul and Silas are indeed “slaves of the most high,” but in those spiritual chains they find ultimate freedom.

The chains of a portcullis can imprison, protect, or free, depending on the context. Nonetheless, even as Equiano dreamt and worked for a day when enslaved Africans would be free from the chains of slavery, we must dream and work for a day when all earthly chains will be broken—even those on the red kneeling cushions at St. Margaret’s.

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ASCENT

after Psalm 126

I cannot go on going forever.
Past a certain point, newness also
becomes a closed system, fleet atoms
and fleeting love in entropic spin. My heart
is friable, fickle, feral—is it mine? I am so
homesick of myself. Where can I go to stop going?
Heaven is perfect, white linen and glass pavement,
but I do not think I would know how to live
there. If I could only ascend that hill
to God's house (and if it were really
a house), then I would know the way
to take off my shoes and set my luggage down
on the breezeway floor—so weary, so weary.
I would sit on the cold tile and slur together
the accents of every place I have been
so that ascent and assent would be
indistinguishable, both rising up
and saying yes.

Matthew Landrum
Hope in Lutheran America

Angela Denker

If you’ve been searching for hope in Lutheran America, I think I found it.

I found it one hundred miles southeast of Kansas City, in a rural Missouri farm town. The region’s green rolling hills and bucolic prairie reminded some early Lutheran settlers of the Bavarian farmlands they left behind in what is today Germany, where Martin Luther first hastened the Reformation.

Cole Camp, Missouri, a town of about 1,200 people, has a disproportionately large number of Lutherans. It’s home to two large Lutheran congregations, housed by two stalwart red-brick churches less than 1,000 feet apart, down Butterfield Trail and Hickory Street. Both churches are nearly at capacity on Sunday mornings, full of young people and families and children—belying statistics about the aging and despair of small-town rural America.

My friend Kimberly Knowle-Zeller, a pastor who lives in Cole Camp, is married to another pastor, Stephen Zeller, who leads St. Paul’s, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Trinity, a congregation of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, is the home congregation of my father-in-law’s family. His older brother still lives at the family farm just outside the city limits, and we held the Denker Family Reunion in the basement of Trinity in July 2018.

I traveled to Cole Camp in 2018 not only for family, but also to conduct research for my book, Red State Christians: Understanding the Voters Who Elected Donald Trump (Fortress). I spent most of 2018 traveling to red states and counties across America, meeting with Christians to talk about faith, politics, family, and grace.

In some places I found living representation of troubling national narratives. I saw pockets of despair in Appalachia and rural New Hampshire, where small towns were ravaged by the opioid epidemic and the demise of manufacturing and mining. In Cole Camp, though, I found hope, surprise, and reason to believe in America. Rural families were holding tight to the idea of an America where loving each other and worshipping a God who saves through Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection still seemed possible. The people I met there and the relationships I observed helped dispel the stereotypes often perpetuated about Christians, about rural America, and about Republicans and Democrats living far from Washington, D.C.

Over sausage and drinks at Wine, Antiques and More, a new locally owned gathering place in Cole Camp, I met Eric and Emily Kullman and Emily’s sister, Erin Oelrichs. With the Zellers, we talked about the 2016 election, Lutheranism, and small-town life for thirty-somethings.

Oelrichs, thirty-two and single, joked about online dating in rural America and the ubiquitous ads for a farmer-specific online dating service.
The three locals crooned the well-known slogan together: “You don’t have to be loonneely at Farmer’s Only...” A longtime suburbanite and city-dweller, I’d never heard it before.

Still, we shared more in common than what separated us. Eric and Emily, parents to young kids, talked about the challenges of juggling work and childcare. A musician, Eric had given up touring with his “red-dirt-road country band,” to come home and marry his childhood friend, Emily, and have a family. The two first reunited at the regionally famous Cole Camp Fair, where the two Lutheran churches host dueling food stands serving nearly identical pies, hot dogs, brats, burgers, and local favorite “juicy burgers,” which my friend Kimberly said were similar to sloppy joes.

Unlike some churchgoers I spoke with in Texas and Florida, these Lutherans in Missouri said that their faith was not tied to partisan politics. They said they voted for Trump based on economic concerns and their belief that he would best support farmers and blue-collar workers. Eric works as a bricklayer and grows row crops, while Erin and Emily’s dad is one of the area’s prominent dairy farmers.

Because of his work in bricklaying, Eric is a union member, but he notes that few Labor Democrats exist anymore in rural Missouri, citing the widely held local belief that the unions had become corrupt. Instead, he talked about a fluidity between liberal and conservative beliefs in their area, noting a local saying that “if you’re young and you’re not a liberal you don’t have a heart, and if you’re old and you’re not conservative, you don’t have a brain.”

These young Midwesterners were willing to discuss issues like racism, immigration, and patriotism, but they were also guarded, wary of being labeled backward or racist. They were proud of their city and their history, and it seemed that extreme segments of both political parties had made it hard for them to talk about past racist incidents or underlying racism in a town with little racial diversity.

After attending church at St. Paul’s on Sunday morning, I got the chance to talk with more Cole Camp residents: this time a group of high school students from the church. They told me that people had misconceptions about them because they were from a small town.

“They might think we are racist, but most of the time we just don’t know better,” seventeen-year-old Carter told me, demonstrating a mix of frankness and humility. His comment revealed the defensiveness and sense of shame among rural Americans when it comes to racism. They saw the sinfulness of racism, yet they felt unable to repent for their own culpability in it. Still, these young people were more earnest and willing to talk about it than the adults.

One of the students I spoke with, fifteen-year-old Delaney, is multiracial, the daughter of a white mother and an African-American father. Her parents have since separated, and she lives with her mom in Cole Camp, while her dad lives in a nearby town. She said he has struggled with drug addiction and she doesn’t see him often, though she does have a close relationship with her dad’s brother, her uncle.

Delaney said she had to choose to ignore the racially charged symbols she saw in Cole Camp, like when people used Confederate flag symbols on their vehicles, bags, or clothing. “I can’t make a big deal over things like that, because then I’d always be making a big deal of stuff, and it would never end,” she said.

Oelrichs, thirty-two and single, joked about online dating in rural America and the ubiquitous ads for a farmer-specific online dating service. The three locals crooned the well-known slogan together: “You don’t have to be loonneely at Farmer’s Only...” A longtime suburbanite and city-dweller, I’d never heard it before.
I noticed a clear tension in Cole Camp between the rural Midwest's white majority that has felt shamed by progressives for handling racial issues poorly and a black and multiracial minority who had felt the pain of being wronged, yet has felt unable to fully express that hurt. This difference is exacerbated in corners of white rural America that have faced ongoing economic hardship, which I noticed was more prominent and painful in Appalachia, for instance, than it was in Cole Camp.

The way forward for both groups... begins with the kind of open listening and self-examination that I heard from the high school students in Cole Camp, an openness to repentance that feels right at home in churches practicing Lutheran theological traditions.

The way forward for both groups, across America, though, begins with the kind of open listening and self-examination that I heard from the high school students in Cole Camp, an openness to repentance that feels right at home in churches practicing Lutheran theological traditions. At the same time, privileging African American voices in rural America to tell their own stories will go a long way toward promoting understanding and ending division.

While America is still working to heal racial wounds almost two hundred years after the end of slavery, repentance and understanding seemed possible in Cole Camp not just on racial injustice but on other painful issues that have divided America. The high school students told me about their recent trip to the ELCA Youth Gathering, where they heard stories from LGBTQ people.

The stories they heard expressed a different understanding about sexuality than was commonly held in Cole Camp, and yet the students were open to listening. They expressed a desire for more American unity, and a hope that their generation would move toward that goal by listening to one another.

"I think our country is so divided now," Carter said. "People don't want to open their minds to talk to both sides. [But] that's something I want our generation to change. We all want the same things: everybody wants to be happy, and everybody wants America to be the best."

"If we accomplish one thing," added seventeen-year-old Camryn, "I hope that we are the understanding generation—the generation that wants to look to understand each other and not hate each other."

As a fellow Lutheran, I was proud of what I found in Cole Camp—from the dual thriving Lutheran congregations in this tiny town, to the farm families working hard to survive, to the high school kids who wanted to listen, learn, and share with others. In an American Christianity searching for sources of hope, I point people to the Lutherans I met in Cole Camp, Missouri.

Angela Denker is a Lutheran pastor and journalist who has written for *Sports Illustrated*, *The Washington Post*, and *Sojourners*. 
SUPER WOLF MOON

I too must be happy with all around me.
–Li Po

It rises
a white bloodless eye,
egg cupped
in the womb of night.
Mover of moods and tides,
fraternal twin of the cold
unheeding earth.

What loneliness
presses the moon onward
faithful each night
as a monk
at his Compline office?

Or is it the hard determination
of one who’s lived too long
without sound, without footstep,
yearning for touch:
one more small step,
one more shadow dance
upon the chest.

Lone cloud, an exhaled breath,
passes before its open wolf mouth.

Think of poor Li Po
seeing the moon’s
reflected face in his wine cup,
mistaking the moon
for his drinking companion.

Still he sings
alone, in the silence.
Dances with his own silhouette,
a friend of moon and shadow
in the time of happiness.

Judith Valente
Three Little Words

David Heddendorf

At some point late in his life, the story goes, Karl Barth was asked for his most significant theological insight. He replied, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." I'm almost embarrassed to relate this anecdote, because it's so often repeated. It's probably the one thing that many people know about Barth. Yet while the exact words of the exchange are disputed, as well as whether it even happened, it reminds us that the Gospel, even for the author of the massive Church Dogmatics, comes down to a simple truth. For all our complex theological systems, the heart of Christianity will always be "Jesus loves me."

As someone who grew up, often uncomfortably, in a tradition of systematic theology—taking notes during sermons, analyzing thorny Bible passages, hearing every conundrum whittled down to a definitive answer—I was ready for a reply like Barth's. I needed three little words to help dispel all the intellectual arrogance and recall me to Gospel basics. But the kernel of truth that ended up nourishing me wasn't "Jesus loves me" or "God is love," as central as those phrases are. The three little words I'd been waiting to hear came from my current pastor—not once but several times.

The instance I remember best occurred in a sermon. After examining Jesus's claim to be the only way to the Father, my pastor asked, "But what about all the people throughout human history who have never even heard about Jesus? Does God hold each one accountable for his or her lack of faith in Christ?"

It was an urgent question, framed in clear, inescapable terms. I waited expectantly. My pastor paused only a second before delivering his answer.

"I don't know."

I didn't jump up in my pew and shout "Hallelujah," but I remember feeling a thrill. Had I ever heard those words from a pulpit before? I'd probably thought to myself, "I don't know" or "I'm not sure" during discussions in Christian circles, but it never seemed like the right thing to say. Here was my pastor admitting he didn't know the answer to a momentous question. He simply dropped it, moving on to things we could know, and could do.

That was a number of years ago, and I remain grateful for my pastor's candor. I admire his willingness to say publicly, "I don't know." But I've noticed something about Lutheranism, my adopted tradition. "I don't know" is a recurring phrase in our theology. These three little words arise in response to inevitable questions about distinctive Lutheran doctrines. How can it be that believers' salvation is predestined by God, yet unbelievers are responsible for their unbelief? How can bread and wine be ordinary substances and at the same time the body and blood of Christ? Lutherans decline to resolve these contradictions. "I don't know," we confess.

And so those three little words help define a system of belief. They can even become a source of pride, a triumphalist catch phrase. "We're the people who dare to say 'I don't know!'" we might boast. At the very least, we claim the words as a signature attitude or disposition.

At the time, my pastor's remark didn't fill me with pride at being Lutheran, or wow me with its theological prowess. Just the opposite. "I don't know" implies humility, putting certainty and superiority aside. Confronted by a divine mystery, we fall silent in holy awe. In A Secular Age, philosopher Charles Taylor writes that people who deny any supernatural involvement in nature nevertheless feel a "sense of wonder" before uniquely human qualities like mind. By contrast, religious
believers too often eliminate mystery by invoking "the modern concept of the 'miracle."" We turn supernatural events into explanatory tools, "a kind of punctual hole blown in the regular order of things from outside, that is, from the transcendent" (547). Seeking a wrinkle-free account of how the universe works, we iron out the mystery. Chalk anomalous circumstances up to a miracle, and suddenly it all makes sense. We've got a metaphysical ace up our sleeves.

As St. Paul likes to say, it isn't so much that we know God (or anything else) as that God knows us (1 Cor. 13:12, Gal. 4:9). And because God knows us, we don't try to explain everything. Nor do we settle for the complacent deferrals of agnosticism. The agnostic shrugs and says, "What do I know?" An astonished teenager, confused about what's happening but known by God, says, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38 ESV).

"It is not for you to know times or seasons," Jesus reminds his inquisitive disciples (Acts 1:7 ESV). Stop calculating, in other words, and start "I don't know" implies humility, putting certainty and superiority aside. Confronted by a divine mystery, we fall silent in holy awe. trusting. For short-sighted souls like us, "I don't know" is not only honest, it's freeing. I don't need to know the future. I don't have to figure out that paradox or inconsistency. I don't need to square every seeming cosmic injustice. What I know is exactly what the old man who wrote millions of words about God knew. Jesus loves me.†

David Heddendorf lives in Ames, Iowa. His essays can also be found online at Front Porch Republic.

Work Cited

START

here before the period
that wants to end every sentence
you stuttered into the night air
just to hear God rattling around
in your shaky syllables. Or here
beside the ellipses bobbing along
on the Sea of Galilee minutes after
his footprints stepped on ship or shore
anticipating your question mark,
which—let's face it—never really ends
anything, just begins a cavalcade of queries
separated by anemic commas
that look more how you feel, a half-hearted
wag to the deity before drowning,
your head separated from hope by semantics
or a slip of the pen. When the weather
kicks up, it's hard to tell, lightning
a jagged exclamation point
for the dry to see by, every buoy
capsized. But let's get back
to the capitalized beginning
of Alpha. For starters—
swim toward the rhythm
of sense. When even that
washes away page
and paragraph, swallow
that first letter of Word. Breathe
in syntax. Begin again.

Marjorie Maddox
Buen Camino: Blessed Are Those Whose Hearts Are Set on Pilgrimage

David K. Weber

LAST SPRING, EIGHT STUDENTS ENROLLED IN my class “Pilgrimage and the Metaphysics of Movement.” Between January and May, we met over meals to discuss Abraham Joshua Heschel’s The Sabbath and Joseph Pieper’s Leisure: The Basis of Culture. We also took long walks in preparation for the class “final.” This final began after we gathered in the city of León, Spain, when we set out to walk nearly two hundred miles of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. Once completed, we each received the compostela, a certificate confirming that we were counted with some 300,000 pilgrims who would, by year’s end, have walked at least one hundred kilometers of the pilgrimage and that we were among the throng who have walked the Way of St. James since the eighth century. When I told one jaded friend about this endeavor, he responded, “Why would you want to do such a thing?” Here is my answer.

Pilgrimage “blesses” the pilgrim in ways that are not evident in the hard facts of the experience. Pilgrimage involves a lot of walking, over a lot of days—miles that could be more efficiently covered on bike or by car. The walking inflicts accumulating joint and muscle pain with blisters on top of other blisters, coupled with the wearing repetition of hot days and chilly nights, the daily demand to find food, and the nightly demand to find a coveted bed in an albergue (which entitles one to experience poor sleep with as many as 120 other noisy pilgrims).

Why do such a thing? Because the bad conditions make for a good pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is an ascetic exercise for the purpose of experiencing and enjoying the blessedness of deprivation. Pilgrims embrace the distinction between needs and wants: Do I need or want rain gear? Do I want lightweight shoes or will I pay the price of lifting four extra ounces 400,000 times for a bit more foot support? (Support wins!) Must I carry an extra change of clothes for three weeks when one will do? (Yes! Love of the neighbor demands it.) Ascetic deprivation looks like the rejection of material things, but it is actually a process of paring and culling that leads the pilgrim to a deeper appreciation for the few things one does have.

DEPRIVING ONE’S SELF OF THINGS, HOWEVER, is infinitely easier than dealing with the powerlessness a pilgrim has over external circumstances. On pilgrimage, each day’s destination is not determined by how well one slept, how one feels, or how much one desires to walk. In fact, around the third or fourth day, no one wants to walk—and no one wants to quit walking. Pilgrimage is an experience of conflicting desires, demanding the ascetic discipline to choose the long-term desire over short-term ones. With each painful step, the pilgrim freely chooses slow progress toward the fulfillment of the truly desired end. After a few days, this movement of tortured soles gains momentum, so that pilgrims...
begin to existentially feel the joy of progress toward the desired rest.

Pilgrimage is an ascetic exercise, which means it is not a real-life experience. It is a contrived exercise that somehow changes the experience of real life, helping a pilgrim creatively re-imagine the meaning of one's life as a movement to the desired end. Specifically, pilgrimage is a way to help us see deprivation as a source of joy. "Blessed are the poor," Jesus tells us in the Beatitudes, and pilgrimage allows us to experience that blessedness in a contrived way. A pilgrim knows that the harder the walk, the happier the rest; the lengthier the fast, the more gratifying the feast. In the morning, the first cup of coffee after two hours of walking is an almost sacramental experience; in the evening, the feast usually entails drinks served with gratis tapas. Getting a bed for a rest-less "sleep" gives a peace that passes understanding, especially when a volunteer has prepared a place for you. On pilgrimage, the blessedness of (contrived) poverty gives a glimpse of how the possibility of poverty in real life need not fill us with fear.

On pilgrimage, the blessedness of (contrived) poverty gives a glimpse of how the possibility of poverty in real life need not fill us with fear.

For me, the experience most analogous to this joy of deprivation is in playing a sport. In this context, joy happens because of the limits of time, space, and action. Why walk when you could drive? Why play a game that prohibits the use of hands?

The joy of a game is not a good analogy, however, when a pilgrim is working through the loss of a loved one, or the loss of one's health. Under these trying—and common—conditions, the pilgrim's sanity and survival depend on discovering how even profound losses can offer blessing. One pilgrim I encountered, having learned that pilgrimage was once a penance for soldiers who killed in battle, was researching the possible therapeutic benefits of pilgrimage for those living with post-traumatic stress syndrome. Perhaps, she thought, the free and physical act of putting one foot in front of the other might counter the afflicted's sense of being trapped, of going nowhere, of being at a loss and being defined by their losses.

Pilgrimage is a physical expression of the metaphysical hope that life's movement is "going good" rather than "breaking bad." This metaphysical hope is routinely expressed in the greeting, "How's it going?" and in the reply, "It's going good." Doubt about this movement is expressed in the familiar phrase, "What is the world coming to?"

Why do we see well-being as a movement toward fulfillment? The word fulfillment answers this question by mashing up the adjective full with the verb fill, defining the going-good life as the repetition of filling that moves toward the desired fullness. Seen sacramentally, the going-good life is experienced as repeated foretastes that, failing to satisfy, deepen the hunger for the feast to come. Every good thing is a foretaste of a future fullness. Imagining that any one good thing in this slipping-away life is "the feast of victory" is finally depressing.

The blessedness of the going-good life is when deprivation moves like hunger and thirst toward the satisfaction of food and drink. Linguistically, the going-good life moves like a promise from immaterial verbalization to embodied incarnation. Chronologically, when we are closer to the end than the beginning of a going-good life, our anxiety over lost time can be transformed into joy because it measures progress toward the fulfillment of our desire. The Book of Genesis describes the going-good life as a movement from nothingness to ever-increasing life—an ex nihilo movement. The Fall reversed this movement, so that life naturally moves an nihilo, or toward annihilation. The Creed declares that Jesus's resurrection reverses that reversal, so that it is reasonable to once again see life as a buen camino (a good pilgrimage), a move from nothingness to ever-increasing life. Reasonable, perhaps, but still difficult—especially when one's life is marked by loss.
The most compelling reason for me to see my life as a pilgrimage is the absence of other hopeful ways to make sense of life’s an nihilo movement. To illustrate my point, let’s consider an analogy for life’s movement that is anti-metaphysical and anti-ascetical. The late David Foster Wallace wrote about his purgatorial experience of a luxury cruise in his 1997 essay, “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again.” It is, of course, unfair to contrast a pilgrimage and a luxury cruise. While pilgrimage has generated volumes of serious metaphysical reflection, the luxury cruise has generated glossy pamphlets promoting the benefits of pampering. Still, it is instructive for our purposes. In the cruise example, the going-good life is not a buen camino. Instead, it’s a bon voyage where one gets pampered (to quote Wallace quoting the brochures) “as you’ve never been pampered before.” The “positively Prozacian” effect of pampering is to make it so “indulgence becomes easy...relaxation becomes second nature...and stress becomes a faint memory.” The going-good life, according to this perspective, can be experienced with “enough pampering...completely and faultlessly administered.” If tomorrow we die, luxury cruisers might think, let us be pampered to death.

Wallace saw a dark metaphysical falsehood in thinking that being “pamper-swaddled” could effect the going-good life. This hard truth is evident in every angry fit of every spoiled child with insatiable demands. Exhausted by the cruise’s pursuit of relaxation, Wallace escapes to his room and avoids shore excursions to shop for luxury goods at ports where people live in poverty. He skips the final night’s “Talent Show and Midnight Farewell Buffet.” Ultimately, disembarking at the end of the cruise gives Wallace a sense of relief to be returning to “the stresses and demands of quotidian landlocked real-world life.”

Why imagine the going-good life as a buen camino and not a bon voyage? Iris Murdoch famously argued that “fat relentless ego” was the chief enemy of the good life. This means that any hope of having a going-good life depends on defeating the ego’s insatiable demands for pampering, self-expression, self-care, and self-actualization. Alternatively, pilgrimage imagines the going-good life as learning to die to the demands of the self through deprivation. For example, when one is on pilgrimage the loss of privacy is exhausting—but it is not only exhausting. Becoming a less private and more public self means that others are aware of a pilgrim’s weaknesses and needs. Sometimes these needs can be met with walking sticks or knee braces or food or some other gift. The self-denying patience and inexplicable cheerfulness of the throng of volunteers infuses this ascetic exercise with joy. The pilgrim who embraces this self-dying has tasted the blessedness of living with one’s heart set on pilgrimage. Buen camino.

David K. Weber is a lecturer in theology at Valparaiso University.

Works Cited
YOUR GLORY SHINES BRIGHTEST
ON THE DIMMEST SURFACES

Every day the abandoned Korean church has its lights on.
The air conditioning unit is falling out from the ceiling,
and ropes warn to not trespass. The ghost of a cross
remains from years of crusted signage.
The sight of abandoned churches
makes me feel
the hollow sorrow of a ghost town
decaying in my chest.
A building is not a church, I have to tell myself.
God is not built out of concrete and glass.
My faith is weak like the rusting facade, relying
on that which I see—
Oh God oh God the rust
Is all I see sometimes
Oh God oh God the rust

Meg Eden
So Late SoSoon? 
Perspectives on Time Among Older Women

Dot Nuechterlein

In his 2004 book What Are Old People For?, geriatrician William H. Thomas, who spent a number of years as a medical director of a nursing home where he had many opportunities to observe and interact with elders, wrote about the change in consciousness of time as people grew older. Children, he said, are masters of being—they enjoy activity, but it is often a part of make-believe. “What children do while they are playing is secondary to what they can be while they are playing.” Adolescence is a time of transition into the adult practice of doing—the world of “tasks and schedules, payments, obligations, and jobs that need to be done.” Adults may sometimes play and just be, but the emphasis is on achievement. And many adults, he says, think everyone should stay in that frame of reference no matter how long they live; they have the subconscious notion that there is unlimited time in which to do, to get, and to have.

However, Thomas suggests that senescence, the process of becoming older, is a time of transition, similar to adolescence except in reverse: the person in later years is gradually letting go of “have to” in favor of “want to,” from doing back to an emphasis on being. The view of time changes as she or he realizes that time is relative, not endless; considering past, present, and future helps them understand the meaning of the lives they have lived. This is a process, not the same for everyone, yet at some point many older people would echo Dr. Seuss when he complained, “How did it get so late so soon?”

Some of those views are evident in responses to the survey question, “What has changed in the way you deal with time?”

I love Time. This is the first time in my life that I am not constantly “doing.” I can sleep in... watch TV without guilt, enjoy long phone conversations. If I’m tired, I just putz around the house and then rest. Time is wonderful, but I am aware that there is less of it to enjoy, which makes it even sweeter.

—Linda, Indiana

There is now time to do what I really want—like lunch with my husband or friends, caring for my grandson, just playing a game on the computer, or doing Sudoku.

—Ruth, Indiana

Dot Nuechterlein, former Cresset monthly columnist (The Last Word, 1983–89), is a retired lecturer in sociology and criminology. For more than three decades she taught courses in aging and women’s studies at Valparaiso University. Her recent book, of which this is an excerpt, includes responses from more than eighty women to questions about issues related to growing older. It is not, Dot says, a “how to grow older” manual, but “a sharing: ‘This is what it’s been like for us—how is it going for you, or for someone you care for?’”
I seem to be blessed with more time than I ever recall having before. I am quite good at finding projects for myself and love having time for those, but I do remember days when I longed for just twenty-four hours of totally unscheduled time. I love having time...to do something...or nothing.

—Sandy, Indiana

Seems I cannot accomplish as much as I used to; plenty of rest and “letting things be” seems natural; I also make attempts to procrastinate less.

—Dawn, Missouri

I miss the scheduling in my work life.

—Carolyn, Illinois

Time is a gift I have been given since retiring. I pray every day that I will not waste it or misuse it. I still do think “I should be doing something,” so to sit in the middle of the day reading causes me some guilt. After all, my house always needs some attention.

—KS, Indiana

Not much has changed—I’m busy as ever. Of course, the events I am busy with are different from when I was working. Can linger a bit longer in the mornings and that is wonderful. I can take time to take walks. I’m just now beginning to be able just to sit and look out the window enjoying the clouds, rain, or sunshine.

—JMB, Indiana

I set priorities for getting things done. Being retired, I’m not constrained by job-related requirements.

—CSP, Maryland

Time flies by—and that’s okay with me.

—Marilyn, Washington

I am a better manager of time, do less fretting and just try to tackle things. I am less “perfectionist” and “good enough” is okay!

—Jean, New York

I am more possessive of my time.

—KY, Indiana

It is moving much too fast and I am moving slower.

—MKL, Indiana

I think I have become more contemplative. I am not so concerned if I don’t “accomplish” a lot in one day. You might say I waste more time.

—EKD, Kansas

I try to be conscious of using my time wisely, doing things I enjoy with my time, and enjoying the people I love.

—MB, Indiana

It is very important to accomplish what I can when I have the time/desire/ability, as tomorrow is an unknown. I have stopped thinking “I should really call... I should really send a note...” and just do it.

—Jo Ann, Indiana

I think I let myself be more present than I used to—time seems to slip away so fast as you get older. Developing some appreciation for the day helps me slow time down a little.

—Debbie, Indiana

I’ve never been too concerned about time—spent years in the Philippines where transportation and weather cause delays. I continue to start out when I should already be someplace... I don’t make excuses, I just come late.

—BJB, Indiana

As I get older, I feel I need to do a lot of things I want to experience in a shorter amount of time. In everyday living, I try to stretch the day out as long as possible—to enjoy happy things and some solitude.

—Stephanie, Indiana

I realize how short time is and how uncertain the future is in the way of doing earthly endeavors. Much of the time is spent in prayer, for faith for myself, for family, for courage, for the ability to make the right choices, for friends.

—KSE, California

When we first retired I felt as if we finally had all the time and money we needed. However, as the end has come so quickly to the lives of many of my friends, I realize that we never have all the time we need. Now I never say, “I’ll do that later.” I may not have a later. Who knew that I would conquer procrastination at this point in my life?

—Sandy, Florida
The Timeless Treasure of a Grandfather Clock

Paul Willis

My mother-in-law passed away a few months ago and bequeathed to us a houseful of dishes, knickknacks, and furniture. I don’t fault her for that—she could be as contrary as any mother-in-law on earth, but in recent years she had sweetened up considerably, and it wasn’t her intention to leave us with so many decisions to make. In trip after trip—seven hours each way—we winnowed the contents of her home. What made it somewhat interesting were the hundred-dollar bills she had hidden in random vases and sock drawers. (Treasure hunt!) But mostly it was a slog.

The plaster-of-Paris wide-mouthed frog went into the dumpster with his kin. The closetful of tasteful hats went to the local hospice thrift shop. The tools in the garage to a handy neighbor. Old novels to my students. Copper pots and pans to our daughter. The TV sound system to our son. The bronze end tables to consignment. And so on. But inevitably, several loads of armchairs, portraits, and miscellaneous paraphernalia were trailered home to our very own garage. Chief among these precious things was a grandfather clock that had been in the family since, well, long before my wife’s grandfather made his appearance in swaddling clothes.

The grandfather clock was an attractive old gent standing just a little higher than seven feet—tall enough for the NBA but a bit too stationary to be effective in the playoffs. Its face was inscribed with its maker’s name, John Barlow, and the place of its making, Oldham, a town outside of Manchester. (I knew a pair of sisters in college with the last name of Oldham. They were from New Jersey, but their people must have been from England. One of them was very tall and the other always on time. Coincidence? I think not.)

Using these clues, we did some sleuthing online and discovered that our clock had been made around 1750 or so, at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution—which, we learned, got some of its glimmer in Oldham itself, thanks to the steam-powered cotton mills that were engineered with the help of local clockmakers. Speaking of engineering, the liberal arts college at which I teach just added a major in mechanical engineering, a move I opposed because (quaint thought) I didn’t think engineering was one of the liberal arts. Not that...
I have anything against engineers. Especially ones with the last name of Barlow.

But back to our clock, wrapped in plastic in our garage and lording over all of the other massed and huddling refugees from another time and place. Would it fit in the house somewhere? My wife and I inspected the walls and corners of each room, looking for a suitable spot. Alas, we found none. Even if we could squeeze it in somewhere, it would dwarf everything else in sight. I finally asked: could we sell it?

“It’s an heirloom!” said my beloved. “It’s been in the family! That would be—so wrong!” Besides, she added, the local antique dealer had said that grandfather clocks were not especially in right now, and ours would fetch only a few hundred dollars.

The grandfather clock was an attractive old gent standing just a little higher than seven feet—tall enough for the NBA but a bit too stationary to be effective in the playoffs.

That’s when a friend happened to mention that our college administration building—a classy old structure that used to be a manor house—once had a grandfather clock in the hallway. That would be nice, my wife thought. We could give the clock away, but it wouldn’t be going too far, since we live right next door to the campus. And because we have both worked at the college since time immemorial, we would almost be giving it to ourselves.

So I sauntered over to the administration building and checked out the cream-white foyer and hallway. Definitely not a good fit. The old wooden clock would stick out like a sore thumb—or more like a throbbing middle finger. Just off the hallway, however, was a high-ceilinged, wood-paneled parlor that plays host to our formal events. Over the years I have arranged more poetry readings in that space than I can count, introducing visiting writers in front of the marble fireplace. So, I peeked inside, and in one corner of that roomy parlor I spotted a very blank wall just begging for a grandfather clock.

We made our offer, the college accepted, and one afternoon, on the stroke of two, I found myself carefully loading the clock like a coffin into the back of a pickup truck for a solemn journey to its final resting place. Once installed, John Barlow’s eighteenth-century creation fit in the room with an unobtrusive dignity. The first people that happened in didn’t even notice it—which, we thought, was just right.

There was one problem, though. In re-hanging the pendulum, I broke off a tiny flange at the top that steadies the motion of the thing. Instead of serenely rocking back and forth, the pendulum now banged crazily into the weights. Reluctantly, we brought it to a timeless halt and comforted ourselves by saying that we wouldn’t want our visiting poets to be interrupted, mid-poem, by the tick-tack and the chiming hours.

But that’s not what my colleagues think. “Don’t worry,” said one of our physics profs. “Our mechanical engineering majors will have that going in no time!”

Paul Willis is a professor of English at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. His latest collection of prose is To Build a Trail: Essays on Curiosity, Love & Wonder (WordFarm, 2018).
When I walked up the stairs I met Thelma. "Do you want an envelope today?"

“No, thanks," I said. "I brought my own." This was my last Sunday worshipping at Bethel Worship Center. I was disappointed that Joyce was not there to greet me.

Every church needs a Joyce.

The first time I walked up the steps to the sanctuary, I didn't know if I'd come through the right door. I didn't even know where the sanctuary was. Joyce was there to welcome me. She looked me right in the eye and said, "Welcome to Bethel Worship Center. I'm Joyce." She extended her right hand, but I could tell her impulse was to hug. I went with her impulse. She handed me a card to write my name, address, email address, and phone number on. She asked if I wanted an envelope. I figured I should get an envelope: she offered, and I was new. "Accept everything," is my default setting when I go to a new place.

The envelopes are for tithes and offerings. During the appointed time in the service, they play a video showing lots of happy people giving and receiving gifts, music playing in the background. The voiceover sings, "The Lord loves, yes He loves, the Lord loves... a cheerful giver!" It's cheesy, but what the hell, this is Wisconsin.

The only person I knew going in was Pastor Joe. His wife, Chaun, is another pastor. Yet another pastor, Pastor Daphne, begins praying fifteen minutes before worship begins. She's getting the house ready for praise. It's extemporaneous—"Father God," and "Hallelujah" are bits of verbal punctuation that can appear at any point during the prayer.

Pastor Chaun begins the service with some opening thoughts. She reads part of a psalm that was on her heart when she woke up this morning. Na Kita, the daughter of Pastors Joe and Chaun, is at the keyboard. There's a guy playing trumpet, a bassist, and three singers. No one plays the drum set at the back of the chancel. A video of Elder Ron, the trumpet player, is projected onto the screen. Video Ron announces the week's activities.

Pastor Joe enters and asks if there are any visitors in the house. I stand. He says, "OK people, let's do what we do best!" The hugging starts. Joyce finds me, hugs me again, tells me how good it is to meet me. She looks me in the eye again. Her face is not wide enough to express her joy. Everything I can see about Joyce tells me she's been though a lot in life; her smile tells me she is all right.

I don't remember Pastor Joe's message from that first visit, but I remember Joyce.

After worship, Pastor Joe invites me to a group of pastors who meet every Monday morning to pray for each other and our community. I hadn't known about the group, and even though I'm no longer serving as pastor of the Presbyterian congregation in town, I accept his invitation.
Yesterday when I climbed the stairs, Thelma hugged me. I didn't want to say, "Where's Joyce?" especially after Thelma's welcome. I found a seat. The band was rehearsing; this morning a new person was playing flute. Just after Pastor Daphne finished getting the place ready for worship, I felt a tap on my shoulder. "Joyce! I'm so glad you found me! I missed you on the stairs today and was afraid you wouldn't be here!"

She hugs me and then says, "I haven't seen you for a while."

"Been doing pulpit supply, filling in—lots of Presbyterians have been on vacation. But I had to be here today. I'm moving. This will be my last Sunday here."

Another hug. Some tears. We're nose to nose now. "I know God's got something in mind for you! But I hate to see you go!"

"This—" I say, with more tears, "is my hardest goodbye."

Joyce returns to door duty. Worship starts. When Bethel starts doing what they do best, Joyce and I find each other. Another hug. Joyce tells me, "A cloud is lifting over you, I can feel it."

"God is good."

"All the time."

I pray the church I am going to start serving next month has a Joyce. Every church needs a Joyce. So does every pastor. ♦

Thomas C. Willadsen has been a Presbyterian minister in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, for nearly two decades. In October, he begins serving a congregation in Nebraska.
## On The Poets

### Meg Eden
Meg Eden's work is published or forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner, Poetry Northwest, Crab Orchard Review, RHINO,* and *CV2.* She teaches creative writing at Anne Arundel Community College. She is the author of five poetry chapbooks, the novel *Post-High School Reality Quest* (Rare Bird Books, 2017), and the forthcoming poetry collection *Drowning in the Floating World.* Find her online at www.megedenbooks.com or on Twitter at @ConfusedNarwhal.

### Matthew Landrum
Matthew Landrum lives in Detroit, where he teaches at a school for people with autism. His work has recently appeared in *Agni, Michigan Quarterly Review, Harpur Palate,* and *Tishman Review.* His book *Berlin Poems* was published in 2019 by A Midsummernight's Press.

### Marjorie Maddox
Marjorie Maddox, winner of *America* magazine's 2019 Foley Poetry Prize, Sage Graduate Fellow of Cornell University (MFA), and professor of English and creative writing at Lock Haven University, has published eleven collections of poetry, a short story collection, and over 550 poems, stories, and essays in journals and anthologies. In addition, Marjorie is the co-editor of *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania* (PSU Press 2005), assistant editor of *Presence,* and the author of several children's books.

### John Poch
John Poch is the author of six poetry collections, two of which were published this year: *Texases* (WordFarm Press) and *Between Two Rivers* (TTU Press—with photographer Jerod Foster). His work has been published in *Poetry, Paris Review,* *The Nation, Yale Review,* and other journals. He teaches at Texas Tech University in Lubbock.

### Richard Schiffman

### Wally Swist

### Judith Valente
Judith Valente is an award-winning author, journalist, poet, and essayist. She is the senior correspondent for WGLT Radio, a National Public Radio affiliate in central Illinois. She writes for *U.S. Catholic* and *National Catholic Reporter,* and is a former staff writer for *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post.* She also worked as an on-air correspondent for Chicago Public Radio and *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* on national PBS-TV.