

# FEC

## Forward in Christ

*The magazine of Forward in Faith North America.*

Vol. 7 No. 2

December, 2014

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Victory Over the War on Christmas  
Epiphany

Pondering and Heartfelt Praise

Christmas is not a Fairy Tale

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# Forward in Christ

The magazine of Forward in Faith North America.

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# From the President

## *Is there Room in your Inn?*

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

So often we can read the historical elements of the Holy Scriptures in such a way that we determine who the heroes and villains are. For example, I suspect that most people would not have a high regard for those in Bethlehem who could offer no room for the Holy Family. We have an image of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph going from Inn to Inn, with Joseph knocking on many doors, pleading for a place for his pregnant wife to deliver her child, as Mary sat on a donkey writhing in pain. Later we learn that one Innkeeper offered a Stable.

So very often when we think of Stables and Mangers we see the lovely ones depicted in pictures, in our homes, and in our churches. While they may well be shown as having rough wood, the reality is that in Bethlehem wood was a rare commodity. In fact the wood used for the Temple in Jerusalem, which is located about 5 miles from Bethlehem, was imported from Lebanon. Olive wood, as lovely as it is for carved Manger figures, is not typically large enough to cut planks that could be used for building.

The greater reality may well be that Jesus was born in a cave in a stone cold manger. There were two types of mangers in animal caves: the rectangular type for the water and the rounded type for the grain. In all probability Jesus, who would follow in his foster father's footsteps as a "tekton" or (according to the Greek) would work with stone, and in the end, would be placed in a stone cave, on a stone slab. But Jesus burst forth from both caves. In the former, to be a light to Gentiles and a glory to Israel, and in the latter to redeem the world.

Today Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts. Sometimes our stables are so filled with anger, hostility, fear, doubt, grudges and pain that there simply is no room for Jesus. Even in the Church today, there are good people who are so angry with the Bride of Christ that they leave no room for the Bridegroom. Jesus seeks to be born in our hearts again, but we need to make room for him. In life there simply are many things over which we have no control, and yet we function, all too often, as if we are in control.

As we celebrate this Christmas Season, let us hand over those things which we simply cannot control, and make room for Jesus so that He can be in control.

Merry Christmas!

Bishop Keith Ackerman  
FIFNA President

### **The FIFNA Daily Prayer**

O GOD our Father, bless Forward In Faith. Inspire us and strengthen our fellowship. Help us to witness to the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that with love and patience we may win many hearts to Evangelical Faith, Catholic Truth, Apostolic Order, and Godly Life with in the fellowship of thy Holy Church. We ask this through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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# In the News

**Talent Pool?** According to the UK's *Church Times*, a £2-million budget has been approved to implement a radical plan to overhaul the way clergyperson get promoted to top jobs in the Church of England.

Entitled *Talent Management for Future Leaders and Leadership Development for Bishops and Deans: A new approach*, the report stipulates that future leaders in the CofE will have to undergo special training and evaluation run by a business school or qualified secular institution. In step two of the promotion program, 150 potential top decision makers, known as a "Talent Pool," will have to pass a 5 year course at the Archbishop of Canterbury's London palace.

Failure to pass the 5 year path to success will result in career candidates being thrown out of the Talent Pool and having to make do as ordinary, if failed, clergypersons. Those fortunate enough to pass Talent Pool training will be promoted to one of the church's top jobs, such as Bishop, Dean, or incumbent of a large, wealthy, parish.

*Forward in Christ* has to ask, is an MBA a necessary requirement for inclusion in the Talent Pool? And when did holiness of life stop being a prerequisite for preferment in the church?

*The Church Times.*

**CofE Gets First Woman Bishop:** In a surprise move, the Church of England announced the appointment of its first ever woman bishop. The Rev. Libby Lane will become the Bishop of Stockton, in greater Manchester. After the unexpected news, Lane said, "So today I pray will not be simply about one woman called up a new ministry in the church but much more than that, an opportunity to acknowledge all that has gone before and to look ahead to what is still to be done."

*The Daily Telegraph.*

**Schori Racism:** The leader of the Episcopal Church, Katharine Jefferts Schori, has stated that Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, MO, might become a "sacramental offering."

According to Schori, "Michael Brown's death was and is a tragedy, and has become a powerful witness to those divisions between human beings in this nation. His death also carries the potential to become a sacramental offering - if it continues to challenge us to address our divisions and the injustices in this nation that are far more than skin deep."

Michael Brown was shot while attacking a police officer and was filmed robbing a convenience store earlier that day. He is pictured on social media holding a wad of banknotes and holding a pistol.

*Anglican Ink.*

**Anglican Schism:** In an interview with *The Times*, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, has stated that the Anglican Communion may not be able to hold together. "I think, realistically, we've got to say that despite all efforts

there is a possibility that we will not hold together, or not hold together for a while," the archbishop told *The Times*. "I could see circumstances in which there could be people moving apart and then coming back together, depending on what else happens." And while Welby stated that he did not believe in "unity at all costs," he is nonetheless committed to the Communion "living together and working it (disagreements) out in practice."

Welby's statements came after overseas visits to the worldwide Anglican Communion's provinces. The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada caused de facto schism in the Anglican Communion by ordaining openly practicing homosexuals. Neither denomination has been disciplined, or sanctioned, despite protests from Anglican provinces that believe in Christian marriage and sexuality.

*Anglican Ink.*

**Jihad and Cathedral:** Savage Muslim "Holy War" (Jihad) continues around the world, with 120 schoolchildren being killed and beheaded in Peshawar, Pakistan, 500 Yazidi women taken as sex slaves in Iraq and, at the time of writing, hostages taken by a Muslim fanatic, in Sydney, Australia.

In light of this ongoing wave of attacks by Mohammedans, it seems strange that Washington's National Cathedral opened its doors for Muslim prayers on the 100th anniversary of the last Caliph's call for Jihad against infidels.

When questioned by Breitbart News, the Cathedral's Dean Hall stated, "I did not know that it was that anniversary. But knowing it now, it actually seems to be more appropriate to have an event that is on an anniversary of a hard time..."


Dean Hall might consider making that point to the families of those Christians who have been beheaded by Muslims in Iraq and Syria.

*VirtueOnline.*

**Hounds of Heaven?** Statements made by Pope Francis at a general audience in November have been understood by media to mean that the Pontiff believes animals, including dogs, will go to heaven. In his sermon to the audience, Francis affirmed that, "The holy scripture teaches us that the fulfillment of this wonderful design also affects everything around us."

The Holy Father went on to say that the "new creation is not an annihilation of the universe and all that surrounds us. Rather it brings everything to its fullness of being, truth and beauty." Milan's *Corriere della Sera* interpreted these remarks as broadening "the hope of salvation and eschatological beatitude to animals and the whole of creation." Other newspapers were quick to follow, proclaiming that the popular Pope has expanded church teaching to include the salvation of pets.

Unlike Pope Francis, Pope Pius VI is reputed to have told a boy that his pet dog would be in heaven as part of "God's eternity." But if good dogs go to heaven, what happens to the bad ones?

*Anglican Ink.* 

# Islamic Atrocities and Christmas

*David Ould reflects on Jihad, the Narrative of Redemption and Christmas*

Like the rest of Sydney I woke up to the awful news that the siege in Martin Place had ended with the death of two of the hostages and the gunman. Lives are shattered and we begin to ask why and how this happened.

As we learn more about the lone gunman, we discover that while he may have been described as “isolated” (in that he was increasingly distanced from the mainstream Islamic community here in Sydney) he certainly could not in one sense be described as “lone”. As soon as the flag with the words of the *Shahada* was pushed up into the window of the Lindt Café it was clear to me that this could not end well.

As isolated or not as this man might be, the particular strain of Jihadism that we are seeing globally is increasingly associated with bloodshed. While I don't like the Prime Minister's chosen descriptor of “Death Cult”, in a sense it is partially true.

But it is not enough to describe the bloodshed's underlying motivation. It was not a skull and crossbones that were printed on that flag.

I've written before about the futile attempt to separate this kind of atrocity from Islam. It is not the totality of Islam but it certainly has a grounding in it. But let's look at another related theme.

A short while ago on ABC News 24, a specialist on this type of violence and Islamic extremism, explained to the anchor that groups like ISIS are attractive to some because of what he described as a “Narrative of Redemption.” That this is true seems intuitively so - we see young men in particular (although the gunman in Sydney was 50 years old) caught up by Jihad in a new sense of urgency and purpose. Many of them have been brought out of lives of (mostly petty) crime and given a new reason to live. But more than that, it is a philosophy that places the emphasis on their own actions. These disenfranchised and disempowered men can now take back the reins of their lives, as they become part of a greater revolution.

What is clear, is that the emphasis is on their own effort and hard work. Jihad is, quite literally, a struggle. It is not just that their particular slanted view of Islam may redeem them - it is that they now have a chance to redeem themselves; not only in the eyes of their peers but, more importantly, in the eyes of Allah. Allah “the Merciful” rewards such Jihad. Of course the juxtaposition of “mercy” and “reward” is incongruous; mercy is that which is not deserved, moreover it is the giving of good things to the undeserving. At the end of it all, violent jihadism is just another version of justification by works, the ultimate human religion, but one in which others are caught in the crossfire.

One of the jarring aspects of this whole tragedy is that



*A Wounded Sydney Hostage*

it all happened just 10 days before Christmas. As I write, Sydney has, in the last week, gone into Christmas mode. There's always that discernible change in vibe from just the season where all the big stores have their decorations up and start plugging gifts for purchase, to that moment when the shoppers are in the mood, too. With that in mind, the Lindt Café would have been decked out in Christmas finery as Man Haron Monis burst through the doors.

Of course, the most jarring difference is that between the actions of Monis and those of the One those decorations celebrate. It's the same dissonance that exists between all man-made religion and the only true religion; trust in the Lord Jesus Christ of whom the angel says:

*Matt. 1:21:* “[Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Here is real redemption. Not that I save myself by my actions and am rewarded by a merciful God (again, note the contradiction in terms) but that another comes and saves me. Here is redemption already won for me, as Zechariah prophesies:

*Luke 1:68:* “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.”

There is no Jihad in following Jesus. All the struggle is done for us. In fact the opposite is true, we are urged in a sense not to struggle.

*Rom. 4:4-8:* “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

Much could be said about this and some contrasts are obvious, if not already much-stated. Both struggles for redemption are costly. For Monis there was not only the cost of his own life but that of others. He no doubt understood that their death was part of his Jihad and justified, as do many others who have acted and will go on to act in similar ways. Jesus, on the other hand, offers up His own life not for His own benefit but for those who have sinned against Him.

That is not to say that Jesus does not look forward to paradise. The Scriptures are clear, pointing us to:

*Heb. 12:2:* "Jesus, ... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

But this is where the similarity ends. Monis, and others like him, look to the death of others who they view as being sinful as their own pathway to paradise.

Jesus offers up His own life so that those who are sinful may be carried to paradise.

Therefore the only answer to the sin and destruction of yesterday is Jesus. He brings redemption to all, no matter what they have done, if only they will trust Him, place their confidence in Him and His death on their behalf.

And He also shows us how to respond, to love our

enemies and to seek their redemption. He brings comfort to the grieving and (not to be forgotten) a promise that all wrongs will be righted.

The events in Sydney over this December have not ruined Christmas. Nothing can ruin Christmas, for the coming of Jesus into the World is greater than any other event. If anything, the deaths of 3 people in the Lindt Café only serves to demonstrate just how wonderful and necessary Christmas is.

Christmas brings to a climax the only Narrative of Redemption that actually works. No man or woman can redeem themselves, no matter how high a price they seek to pay or extract, and so Jesus came willingly to give His life to pay the price to redeem us. In doing so, He models for us the proper gracious response to the injustice we experience or perceive around us.

Let the tragedy of Martin Place drive us all the more towards the Narrative of Redemption that is Christmas.



*David Ould is Rector of Glenquarie Anglican Church in Sydney, Australia. He writes at davidould.net and at Standfirminfaith.com, from which this article was republished with permission.*

# A Battle Won

*By Dr. Colin Podmore*

That England and America are "divided by a common language" is as true of the churches as of their nations. The differences go beyond words with different meanings (e.g. "parish", "primate", "province"). Church cultures and those of the societies they inhabit differ markedly. Great caution is therefore needed when viewing developments in one church from the perspective of another.

The ease of internet communication ought, by increasing the availability of information, to make this more apparent. All too often, however, inhabitants of the blogosphere seem imprisoned by their own context, unable to make the mental journey to the other. Indeed, they commonly appear to use such information as they glean to bolster their own positions, as ammunition in their own battles, rather than to foster greater understanding.

The situation regarding women's ordination, and that of Anglo-Catholics, in the Church of England and The Episcopal Church could hardly differ more. The common prediction that what has happened in the USA will eventually happen in England is (like all predictions) impossible to disprove, but the differences in history, context and situation suggest that it is very unlikely to prove correct. In the Church of England the story of the twenty years since the first women priests were ordained in 1994 has differed greatly from that in the USA over the previous twenty years. There is no reason to believe these differences will not persist.

The English decision of November 1992 concerned only the priesthood: ordaining women to the episcopate remained illegal for another 22 years. Provision for those unable to accept priestly ministry from women was contained in legislation that had the force of an Act of Parliament and

in an Act of Synod that had been approved not just by the House of Bishops but by overwhelming majorities in the Synod. The latter was the 'quid pro quo' for a decision by the catholic diocesan bishops who were in office when the legislation came into force not to prevent the ordination of women as priests in their dioceses.

Forward in Faith recognized long ago that ordaining women as priests made women bishops inevitable. Throughout the 14-year process leading to the July 2014 decision Forward in Faith and the Catholic Group in General Synod have consistently explained why ordaining women as priests and, *a fortiori*, as bishops is wrong. But we have not been trying to prevent or even delay the inevitable. Forward in Faith's most substantial contribution to the theological debate (a debate in which the rest of the Church of England was almost completely uninterested), the book *Consecrated Women?* (2004), exemplifies this: it also contained a lengthy report proposing draft legislation to introduce women bishops and make provision for those who would be unable to receive their ministry.

In November 2012 the Catholic Group was able to defeat legislation, the terms of which were unacceptable. This was achieved in alliance with conservative evangelicals and thanks to the crucial support of 'swing voters' who, while not opposed to women bishops, were unwilling to vote for legislation that did not make proper provision for those who could not receive their ministry.

But it was never going to be possible to defeat legislation that was accompanied by acceptable provision – the votes were simply not there. Nor was it in anyone's interest to prolong wrangling over an issue that has been a distraction

from mission for more than a decade.

It is against this background that the strategy of Catholic Group and Forward in Faith in the last two years must be understood. Two members of the Group (a diocesan bishop and a priest) served on the committee that drafted the new legislation and associated documents, and the resulting package was judged good enough for us not to seek to defeat it.

(I have explained both the 2012 vote and the genesis of the new legislation in an article in *The Living Church*: <http://livingchurch.org/women-bishops-2014-10-29>)

It was understood and accepted that the Catholic Group would, as a matter of principle and conscience, vote at the revision stage against those clauses that provided for women to be priests and bishops, and against final approval of the legislation as a whole – as all but a handful of its members did.

That 23% of the House of Laity voted against, twenty years after the first women priests were ordained, is significant. So are other facts. The latest statistics show 742 parishes in which, by Parochial Church Council resolution, it was hitherto against the law for a woman to minister as a priest – 368 of these receiving episcopal ministry under the Act of Synod. Moreover, in July there were still ten catholic diocesan and suffragan bishops who did not ordain women as priests (all of them members of Forward in Faith) – four consecrated during the period when the previous legislation was under consideration and two in 2013. After the vote, one of the suffragans retired and Fr Philip North (a Forward in Faith member aged 48) was appointed to succeed him – by a diocesan who ordains women, with the support of his bishops' council (most of whom support women's ordination). His consecration will probably be the first after enactment of the Women Bishops canon.

The catholic bishops' statement after the vote reflected the dual approach that Forward in Faith and the Catholic Group had been following throughout. They deeply regretted the further obstacle that the decision to ordain women as bishops had placed in the path to full, visible unity, but welcomed the provisions for those unable to receive their ministry.

The House of Bishops' Declaration which contains these provisions is not law (such a law would in any case now be difficult to get through Parliament), but will in practice be enforceable (which the Act of Synod was not) by means of a Resolution of Disputes Procedure involving an Independent Reviewer (Sir Philip Mawer, formerly Secretary General of the Synod, subsequently Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards). The procedure is established by Regulations made under canon. Failure to participate in the process will be a disciplinary offence – and so (legal opinion holds) will non-compliance with the Reviewer's recommendations.

Security is provided by the fact that the Declaration and the Regulations can only be amended or rescinded by the House of Bishops, and only if two-thirds majorities in each of the other Houses agree.

A Forward in Faith commentary, with a link to the relevant texts, is available at [www.forwardinfaith.com/resources/women-bishops.html](http://www.forwardinfaith.com/resources/women-bishops.html)

The Declaration fulfils the bishops' "duty to ensure that the welfare of the whole Church of England is sustained in all its theological depth and breadth" (para. 4).

Five "Guiding Principles" (para. 5) are fundamental. The Church of England locates "its own clear decision" within "a broader process of discernment" (i.e. reception) "within

the Anglican Communion and the whole Church of God". Because those "who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests" continue to be within the spectrum of Anglican teaching and tradition, "the Church of England remains committed to enabling them to flourish within its life and structures" and "pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority" is made "without specifying a limit of time and in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England".

The Declaration promises 'equal treatment' regarding resource issues (para. 15). Diocesan senior leadership roles will be "filled by people from across the range of traditions" (para. 13). In discerning vocations "bishops will continue not to discriminate on the grounds of a candidate's theological conviction on this issue". Ordination services must comply with the Guiding Principles – respecting both the diocesan's jurisdiction and the ordinand's conscience (para. 15).

PCCs can pass, by a simple majority, a resolution requesting priestly and episcopal ministry that accords with their theological conviction on women's ordination (paras 19-20). All concerned will be obliged to do "everything possible" to avoid conflict with this theological conviction (para. 23). Bishops must veto conflicting

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appointments in order to protect lay representatives from having to do so (para. 24).

Alternative bishops, who cannot be retired (para. 26), will “provide oversight” (para. 22), having responsibilities like those of suffragan bishops (para. 29). The Archbishops will be obliged to secure a sufficient supply of suitable bishops, the suffragan sees held by the three Provincial Episcopal Visitors being the starting point (para. 30).

The promises in the Act of Synod were mostly kept, but if they were not, there was no redress. If these new promises are reneged upon, we can appeal to the Independent Reviewer.

With the support of Forward in Faith, the catholic bishops

are gradually building up The Society ([www.sswsh.com](http://www.sswsh.com)) as an ecclesial structure within the Church of England in which we can enjoy full communion.

We give thanks to God that the struggle for provision has been won, and that the House of Bishops’ Declaration offers us a basis for flourishing. The challenge now is to seize the opportunities that we have been given, for the sake of the Gospel and the Kingdom.



*Dr Colin Podmore, a former Clerk to the General Synod of the Church of England, has been the Director of Forward in Faith (UK) since 2013.*

## A Teaching Mission to Tanzania

*Fr. Larry Bausch leads an Anglo-Catholic mission*

In the 1860’s, Anglo-Catholic missionaries representing the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) took the Gospel and Church to the coastal region of Equatorial East Africa. This missionary effort preceded by a few years the more evangelical missionaries representing the Church Missionary Society (CMS), who worked primarily in the interior. Now, about 150 years later, the Anglican Church in Tanzania has retained these different traditions. As in other parts of the Anglican Church, these divisions do not always produce mutual understanding and support. The Anglo-Catholic Diocese of Dar es Salaam has been endeavoring to rejuvenate its tradition under the leadership of its current bishop, Valentino Mokiwa, who was consecrated and became Diocesan in 2002.

Bishop Mokiwa visited our parish, Holy Trinity, in 2004 and 2008. After attending his enthronement as Archbishop in May 2008 (he completed his term in 2013), I preached at a Mass of Thanksgiving in the Cathedral in Dar es Salaam, at which time he made me an honorary Canon. In the six years since then I have sought ways to assist him in his ministry, and in early 2014 we began to develop a way to do so. These plans came to fruition in October 2014.

Bishop Mokiwa invited me to assist him and several senior priests to create a Cathedral School for teaching Church Tradition and Order. Additionally, I was asked to get it started by offering a week of teaching for his priests. The theme I was given was “Sanctity and Holiness in the Anglo-Catholic Tradition”, with the aim “to inspire and challenge the clergy, leading to deepening devotion and pastoral practice, and enthusiastic mission.”

The following are the key points I intended to stress:

The catholic center of Anglicanism. The devotional core of Anglo-Catholicism in the Mass, the Office and personal devotion and the necessity of mission.

I began my time in Dar es Salaam meeting with three priests for two days at the Cathedral, during which time we discussed the situation in the Diocese and national church and the need for continuing formation and education for the clergy. Among the main insights for establishing this school was that their best resources would not be books or programs but people. Personal visitation to parishes by speakers identified as being especially gifted in specific



*The Anglican Cathedral, Dar es Salaam*

areas was seen to be a great help, and therefore the School coordinators would develop and publish a list of such people.

Also, the specific shape of my teaching days was developed. I had five half-day classes and one full-day retreat. The first day and retreat were designed for all priests and the other four days for senior clergy. This meant about 45 to 50 priests in the larger sessions and 25 to 30 for the others. Each presentation required translation and I worked with a fine young priest who did this daily. The following served as the outline for the daily sessions:

First Day - Anglicanism as renewed Catholicism and the



context, emergence, doctrine and practice of the Anglo-Catholic Movement.

Second Day – Sacramental Theology, with especial focus on the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist.

Third Day - Sacramental Theology, with teaching on the five sacraments not covered on day two and an explanation of the theology and practice of various sacramentals, such as Holy Water.

Fourth Day – Kalendar and Creeds, examined the church year, the meaning and value of the Creeds and the Four Last Things (Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell).


Fifth Day – An all-day Retreat on Prayer and Holiness of Life.

Sixth Day - Mission and Evangelism for Anglo-Catholics.

This time was both an honor and a challenge to me. Much teaching of this type involves the use of illustration, and I was unable to use illustrations that I would have used in the United States because they were not commonly shared. However, conversations with several clergy helped give direction, and the experience was very much “learn as you

go”.

I was also able to spend three afternoons visiting parts of the Diocese, twice with the bishop. He has done much to strengthen the mission of the Church in his Diocese, especially in the areas of health care and education. Upon attaining independence in the 1960’s, the government took both schools and hospitals from the Church, and so Bishop Mokiwa has begun new work in these areas and lobbied the government to return some schools in particular. I visited an orphanage under construction which will house 20 babies and infants, sites of primary and secondary schools, a college, and a health care center started under Bishop Mokiwa.

I found my visit invaluable and encourage members of Forward in Faith to consider supporting our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world in a personal way. Money helps, but personal interaction accomplishes things that money never could. 

*Canon Larry Bausch is a member of Forward in Faith North America’s Executive Council and Rector of Holy Trinity, Ocean Beach, California.*

*Bishop Mokiwa has been invited to be a keynote speaker at the upcoming International Catholic Conference for Anglicans this July.*

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## ***A Prayer for Africa***

O heavenly Father,  
Look down in mercy on Africa.  
Bless the plains, rivers, trees  
And all the African lands.  
Bless the birds, fish and animals  
That bring beauty and abundance to Africa.

Bless O Lord,  
Your children in Africa.  
Dry their tears,  
Bring hope into their hearts,  
Health and safety to their lives,  
Food and water for their nourishment.  
Bring peace to their countries  
And still the guns of war.

Bless us, O Lord,  
And heal your continent of Africa.  
Renew the land, and renew the spirit  
Of all those who are wounded in any way.  
May your loving presence roll down like water  
On the parched ground of your beloved  
Africa. Amen.

# Victory Over the War on Christmas

*By Shane Schaetzel*

Every year we hear about it. Some new department store chain has changed the word Christmas to “Holiday” and instructed their employees to say “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas.” The laughable example of the “Holiday Tree” comes to mind. I saw this in a supercenter a couple years ago. A “Six Foot Holiday Tree with Built In Lighting” was just \$39.99+tax. It was hideous actually, but I couldn’t stop myself from chuckling out loud. Go to a typical department store and just try to find “holiday” decorations with an overtly Christian flare. Good luck! There may still be a few holdouts here and there, but for the most part, if you want Christmas decorations that focus on the Christ child, you almost have to go to a religious store to find them. If you do find a regular store that still sells Christian decorations, please patron them, and be sure to tell all your friends and family to do the same. We should be sure to reward those establishments that still honour the real reason for the season.

In America this politically correct trend, toward the purging of Christ from Christmas, has been dubbed the “war on Christmas.” Americans seem to be obsessed with violence, and as a result, many new social trends seem to become a “war” on something. In this case however, the metaphor may be justified, because there really is a purging going on, and to those on the receiving end of it (Christians) it truly does feel like a war they’re losing.

In truth, this metaphorical “war on Christmas” has been going on for a very long time, and I think it began decades ago with the hyper-commercialisation of Christmas. I remember working in a department store about a quarter of a century ago. (I say it that way just to give a perspective of how long this has been going on.) It was a popular arts and crafts store. It was December, so naturally we were selling all sorts of Christmas decorations. One night a finely dressed Asian woman and her children came into the store frantically looking for lights and decorations. Her English was good, but I could tell she was new to the country. I helped her find everything she needed. She seemed very concerned, that if she didn’t decorate her house as quickly as possible, she might be seen as disrespecting our culture or something. She had many questions about these decorating traditions which were very foreign to her. I explained to her that all

the fuss was about celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Then she stopped and looked at me in the most astonished way. “Jesus Christ?” she asked. I explained the whole thing to her. She was amazed, and even more confused. She told me she thought the whole thing was about Santa Claus, and presents, and most of all -- being American!

Now I bring up this true story to illustrate a point. What kind of message is our culture sending with all of this pomp and circumstance we do every December? This lovely immigrant I met twenty-five years ago had been looking at decorations go up for weeks and yet she made no connection to a religious celebration. If you ask me, that’s an indictment, not of her but of us, and especially our culture. This “war



on Christmas” has been going on for a very long time. Long before “happy holidays” and “holiday trees,” our Christian culture surrendered our Christmas celebrations to the cult of commercialism. In fact, I would say this surrender began an extremely long time ago, way back in the early twentieth century. It started when retailers learnt that December was the biggest shopping month of the year, thanks to the popular Christian celebration of exchanging gifts on Christmas. So to generate more sales, they needed to promote the Christmas holiday, but to do that, they couldn’t get too religious. After all, Jews shop in December too, and so do atheists and non-religious people. Any overtly Christian message might drive those customers away. So immediately, there

was an attempt to scale back the religious connections to Christmas, and an emphasis was put on popular folk tales and cultural mythology instead.

It wasn’t long before Santa Claus became the focus of Christmas more so than Jesus Christ. Now this may seem odd, since Saint Nicholas was not only a Christian figure, one of particularly Catholic character, but it wasn’t the historical Saint Nicholas retailers were interested in promoting. Rather, it was some fabricated mythical character resembling the “jolly old elf” from Clement Moore’s classic 1823 poem “Twas the Night Before Christmas”. With the retail adoption of that particular version of Santa Claus, the commercialisation of Christmas was in full swing, and for quite a while, Christian Americans naively embraced it. As time went on however, promotion of Santa Claus simply wasn’t enough, and fears

arose that any mention of Christ in Christmas might offend non-Christian shoppers. So then came the purging. Not only would the mythical Santa Clause be promoted, as well as all the other mythical characters that arose during the twentieth century, but all mention of the Christ child was to be gradually eliminated. Again, our American culture simply went along with this, not realising the full scope of what was happening.

Then, roughly about ten to fifteen years ago, the unthinkable happened, and we finally hit the overreach of political correctness. Not only department stores, but public schools as well, stopped saying "Merry Christmas," and substituted the term "Happy Holidays." The holiday phrase had been used for a long time of course, in general public discourse, mainly to refer to Christmas and Hanukkah together, but now for the first time, people were being told not to say Christmas any more. Thus the metaphorical "war on Christmas" was born, and here we are today with our happy holidays, holiday trees and our festival of lights. Where is Christ in all of this? Well, he's not in the department stores. That's for sure. You won't find him on the campus of public schools. Outside of very rare occasions, he's not usually featured on television Christmas specials. Thankfully, we still have him on the radio, now and then, with some popular Christmas carols from ages past. However, with all the new pop artists releasing Christmas albums every year, I'm not sure how long that will last. Indeed, if we rely on retailers, governments, artists and broadcasters to keep Christ in Christmas, we're done for.

That's the problem really. We Christians have been relying on others to fight our battles for us, and that is our undoing. These days I hear a lot of people bemoaning the commercialisation and secularisation of Christmas (er, I mean "holiday time"), but we fail to see that everything we need to win the battle is already in our hands. It's time to stop cursing the darkness and create a light -- a big light -- one that will outshine and outlast all those inflatable yard ornaments. It's really simple. Any Christian family can do it, and any Christian pastor can promote it.



The solution draws heavily upon our Christian liturgical calendar, which is already familiar to many Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and Lutherans. This will be new to Baptists, Pentecostals and Evangelicals, but they can catch on rather quickly. It's called Advent and the Twelve Days of Christmas, or Christmastide.

For our Christian brethren who might not know, Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. So look at your calendar, find Christmas, and count back four Sundays. That's the start of Advent. Now Advent is a time when we prepare for Christmas, just like everyone else, but as Christians, we should be making this a particularly religious occasion.

For example; I don't have a problem with mythical Santa, elves and flying reindeer. However, if our intention is to put Christ back into Christmas, than maybe we should leave the fairy tales in the attic and showcase the nativity scenes front and centre. On a personal note, my annual Christmas outdoor display is very simple. I put the Holy Family in the middle of my front yard, and surrounded them with little spiral Christmas trees. That's it! It's nothing fancy, but it definitely gets the point across. There is no way anyone can drive by my house and not know that Jesus Christ is the reason for our celebration. Multiply a display like this by a several million, and don't tell me it wouldn't have some kind of impact on our culture. It would. So when you're

putting up those Christmas lights, think about this. How can you tell your neighbours, and everyone who drives by, that Jesus is the sole reason for the season?

Then of course there is the Advent wreath. Every Christian home should have one, or at least four Advent candles, to light one for each week, until all are lit. Children love this custom, as it serves as a visual countdown to Christmas. Every candle lighting session in the home should be accompanied by the song "O' Come Emmanuel" to remind everyone in the house what this season of Advent is about. The word Advent means "coming" and it is a Latin translation of the Greek word Parousia. During Advent we contemplate Christ's two comings.

At the First Advent he came to us as a babe in a stable, to save the world from sin. In his Second Advent, he shall come to us in the clouds as a conquering King to judge the world and bring us into eternity. This is a side of the Advent season sorely neglected in our modern age, and needs to be brought back. The song "O' Come Emmanuel" has a haunting double meaning when Christ's Second Advent is considered, with the understanding that the Church as the "Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16).

Advent calendars have also become popular in recent centuries. These usually start on December first and end on the twenty-fourth. Children love



January 6. Here is why. Christmas is not a day. It's a period of time lasting twelve days. It starts on December 25, which is the Feast of the Nativity, wherein we remember the birth of Christ and the visit by the shepherds. Then it goes through until January 6, which is the Feast of the Epiphany, when we remember the visit of the magi (wise men).

Now stop and consider this. The commercialised Christmas (holiday) ends on December 25. By December 26 it's over. So long as Christians celebrate Christmas this way, the commercialisation and secularisation wins. The way to gain victory over the "war on Christmas" is to keep celebrating long after everyone else has stopped. So get as many recordings of religious Christmas music as you can, and keep them playing through January 6. Call those Christian radio stations, playing Christmas music in December, and nicely tell them if they're really "Christian" they should keep that Christmas

music going through January 6. Keep all the decorations up, and for heaven's sake, don't turn out those Christmas lights! Keep them going! Instead of having one giant dinner on Christmas Eve with the whole extended family, maybe consider two or three (or more) Christmas dinners, at various houses, during the twelve days of Christmas. Share the cooking and hosting you see. Then get religious! Attend church services more often during Christmastide (the twelve days of Christmas). This is the time for carolling, parades, pageanties and parties. Churches can organise a lot of these things. If pastors begin working together with other pastors, across denominational lines, they can begin community pageants and parades with a strictly religious theme. The New Year celebration can take on a much more traditional religious tone. While many Christian families can break up their gift-giving into two parts. Some gifts on Nativity (December 25) and some gifts on Epiphany (January 6).

As Christians, we should be particularly careful to get Advent calendars with a religious theme. Some Christians observe Advent with mild fasting and abstinence. While this is not an official practice, it is observed by some, and of course there is nothing wrong with that. Others prefer to look at Advent as a time of increasing joy and expectation. Certainly this is the case with most children. I prefer the latter approach. But one thing Christians should be mindful of is a slowness and tranquillity in our Christmas preparations. This is so completely opposite of how things usually work. One of the ways my family deals with this is by getting all the big things out of the way first. Shopping is done early, the earlier the better. Avoiding the chaos of department stores and supercentres is a must for me. Christmas decorations go up immediately after Advent begins, so I'm not trying to rush them later. Wrapping of gifts happens early too, usually weeks before Christmas Day. Everything is done as early as possible to reduce the Christmas rush, and try to enjoy the time of Advent for what it is. Advent is supposed to be a time of peaceful preparation for the coming of Our Lord, wherein we remember his first coming as the babe in a stable, and look forward to his Second Coming as our King in the sky. It is so important that we project to the world an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. Our celebration of Advent and Christmas should be a joyous one, completely disconnected from the hustle and bustle of the commercialised "holidays" put forward by retailers, governments and broadcasters.

Retailers can control what they put on their shelves, and what they tell their employees to say. Schools and government offices can do the same. None of them, however, can control time. That is something we Christians have on our side. The commercial and secular "war on Christmas" has a flaw. It's an Achilles Heel that we can easily exploit to our advantage. Santa Claus only comes on Christmas Eve. In other words, the whole commercialisation and secularisation of Christmas is dependent on everything coming to a close on the morning of December 25. Whatever happens after December 25 is beyond the control of retailers and government institutions. If Christians will simply reclaim the historical celebrations of Advent and Christmastide, which rightfully belong to them anyway, victory over the "war on Christmas" will be inevitable. We can't stop the commercialisation and secularisation of Christmas, but we sure can render it irrelevant.

Now get ready because Advent is just the preparation. I'm about to tell you how to strike a death blow to the metaphorical "war on Christmas." This is how to do it. Prepare and then STOP. That's right, I said, "Prepare for Christmas and then STOP." Don't go any further. There should be no Christmas parties prior to December 25. There should be no carolling prior to December 25. Once everything is ready, STOP and enjoy the lights, music and candles until December 25. Then, on Christmas Eve (the evening before December 25) GO! -- the partying begins. Not only does it begin on December 25, but it shouldn't stop until

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# Christmas is not a Fairy Tale

*Fr. David Allen defends Christmas against the atheists*

I have looked in vain on the internet for a good response to The American Atheists' recent anti-Christmas billboard campaign. This features a smirking girl writing her imaginary friend, Santa. "Dear Santa," writes the little disbeliever, "All I want for Christmas is to skip church. I'm too old for fairy tales." If that's the case, why is she writing a letter to Santa Claus? With that in mind, this latest attempt to abolish Christmas deserves a response.

I understand why they are using billboards and especially at Christmas; Christmas is a bad time for atheists even in a highly secularized culture. But I must say that this apes bad religion. Instant messaging is not the way to impart serious matters to folks. That many Christians rely on clichés and slogans to win adherents to the faith is not something we should imitate.

Politicians may use this approach to some effect but when we evangelize we are not trying to get people to vote for us and then maybe vote for someone else next year. It will not work for atheists any more than it works for Christians. I want to take atheists seriously just as I want to take Christians seriously and that is nearly impossible when both parties imagine that I am the kind of creature that can be convinced by a billboard.

Some folks have counter-charged that atheists believe in the "fairy tale" of evolution. The difficulty with that is that evolution whatever else it might be, is not a fairytale. Fairy tales begin "once upon a time" and involve no real places, people or events. The theory of evolution does not begin that way and does require real places, people and events. The Christmas story in St. Luke's Gospel, the Gospel read on Christmas in liturgical churches, also does not begin "once upon a time" but this way:

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city".

From the very beginning of his gospel Luke insists that he is trying to get the facts straight:

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed."

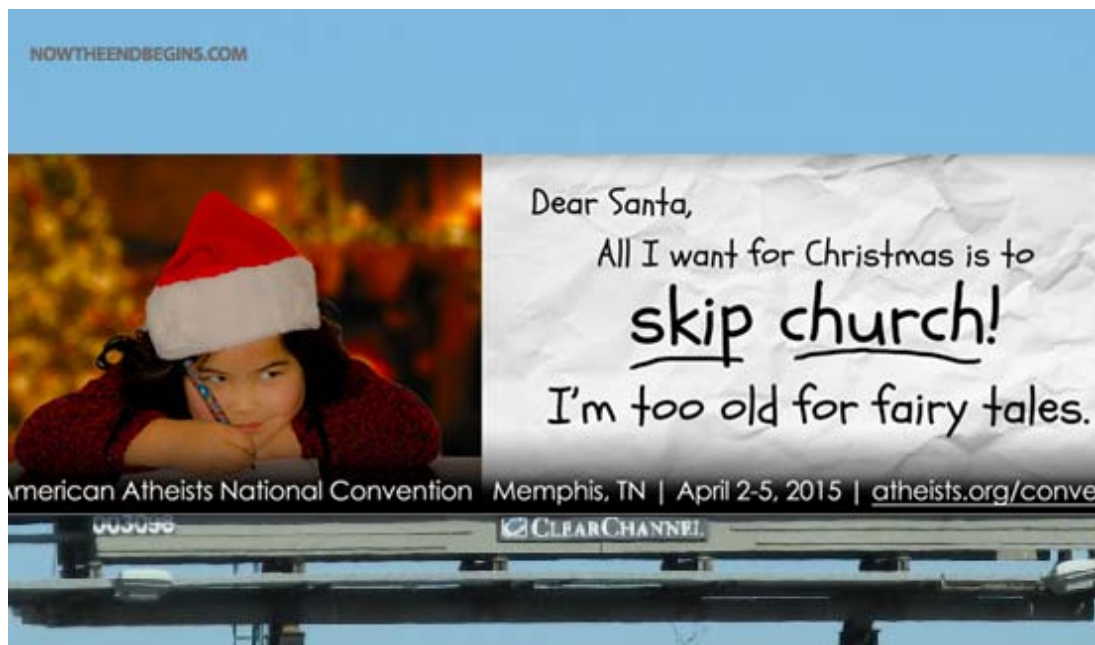
What Luke intended to do was write history based on evidence. You can say that he was not a very good historian, that he was not objective, and that he was mistaken about the facts. But you cannot dismiss his account as a fairy tale, any more than you can dismiss Darwin's account as something other than an attempt to give a scientific account of the "Origin of Species." Darwin too may not have been a very

good scientist, may not have been objective and most would now say certainly he was mistaken about some of the facts.

It is hard to say what people who see the billboard might imagine a fairy tale to be. It is possible that the fairy tale angle could backfire on the atheists. Many people rather like and enjoy fairy tales with damsels in distress, knights in shining armor, dragons, talking animals, magic wands and all the rest. Hollywood bears this out. Most TV shows, movies, and computer games are reworks of fairy tales.

But what the atheists mean by a fairy tale is a "fantastic story meant to deceive." American Atheists President, David Silverman, has said, "Even children know churches spew absurdity, which is why they don't want to attend services. Enjoy the time with your family and friends instead. Today's adults have no obligation to pretend to believe the lies their parents believed. It's OK to admit that your parents were wrong about God, and it's definitely OK to tell your children the truth."

It is my experience that children press their parents to let them go to Midnight Mass long before the weary parents are willing to take them. The





discourse and in much that is written is what you have when you believe in the existence of God.” But for St. Thomas “the existence of God is not strictly speaking even part of faith . . . it is what faith presupposes.” Even if you are not able to construct an argument for God’s existence or even follow one, it is enough for you to know that it is perfectly reasonable to say that God exists. We cannot prove through reason alone the Trinity and the Incarnation, but these doctrines are not based on nothing but on the existence of God who reliably reveals himself as the Triune God and the Incarnate Word. We believe all the rest on the basis of the truth that God exists. One of those awful, mean, nasty medieval theologians, Hugh of St. Victor, said that faith is “midway between science and opinion.” More than just a fantasy but less than a philosophical, mathematical or natural scientific certainty.

atheists will say that this is because they have been duped by their parents. However, it is also true that church children are often asked by their unchurched friends if they can go with them to Midnight Mass. Part of it, no doubt, is the attraction of being able to stay up late. But there is more to it than that; the romanticism of the High Mass, the splendor of the music, the ancient drama of welcoming not some old codger but a child, not a mythical creature but a child just like them. It’s interesting to note that when parents argue in favor of something more “mainstream,” or what I would call “dumbed down,” it is always the children who say “no way!”

But are churches spewing absurdities or parents believing lies, wrong about God and not telling their children the truth?

This is the real agenda of the American Atheists: not to protect children from boring church services but to insist that people who believe are lying, only pretending and believing absurdities. Although you might not know it, to listen to many Christians, faith is not irrational or absurd but based on science. Sound impossible? “Science” (*scientia*) before the natural scientists began to monopolize the word meant simply “knowledge.”

Knowledge can be acquired in different ways: observation, mathematics but also rational thinking. Faith is not based on nothing. There are at least two dozen or so arguments for the existence of God, some more convincing than others. But there are no convincing arguments against God’s existence. That is why in an earlier atheist campaign in the UK the sign on the side of the bus said “there probably is no God.”

Faith, writes the Dominican peritus (expert) on St. Thomas Aquinas, Dr. Brian Davies, “in much day-to-day

In fact, Christianity is not the only view of the world which depends on faith. So does natural science. Natural scientists assume that the world outside their minds is real and objective and is structured in such a way that we can discover laws by which to explain what goes on in the world. Scientists do not sit down first and prove that the world is real. They just trust that it is real. Anyway, you cannot prove scientifically that there is a real world outside your mind. But you can prove philosophically that there is and indeed Plato and Aristotle (and their Christian successors) proved that very thing not by using the scientific method but logic.

The atheists tell us that instead of going to church at Christmas, we should “enjoy the time with your family and friends.” This seems to me the rankest hypocrisy. If you really hold that Christmas is a fairy tale, a lie, and a deception, you should ignore it entirely, go to work, forget family, friends, the presents and the food.

On the other hand, you can keep the Feast.

FC

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# Thinking Out Loud

*Bill Murchison*

The human tempests lately sweeping the country – rape allegations at the University of Virginia, and in the U. S. military; racial protests and rioting over police conduct; growing and growling bitterness during the sweetest of seasons – have as much to do with moral decay as with circumstances.

A moral system presupposes some general level of personal restraint in word and deed; some level of decorum and consideration for others. Yeah. Well. That's not where we are right now. Nor have we been there in a lot of years. We live in the "But I Wanta" Era: I want what I want when I want it.

The problem is massive and complex. What the country needs, it probably isn't going to get right now – recovery of some broad sense that obligation, no less than free choice, holds societies together. Such sense of obligation as Americans retain is a holdover from the past: presently sporting frayed cuffs and blood stains from endless battles over the fraught question: Are some things, some modes, some behaviors more civilized than other things, modes, and behaviors?

Unlimited personal choice, alas, hasn't turned out to be the blessing its acolytes, half a century ago and more, made it out to be.

The University of Virginia uproar over a sexual assault that seemingly never took place is a good case in point. The point to which commentators cling, and which is not a wrong point at all, though I would go further, is that *Rolling Stone* magazine neglected its journalistic duty in printing, virtually without investigation, the claim of a UVA student to be the victim of gang rape at a fraternity house.

*Rolling Stone* has since owned up to journalistic malpractice, and the feminist-driven narrative has backfired on its proponents, eager as they seemed at first to discredit (a) males, (b) a Southern university, and (c) fraternities; a galaxy of politically incorrect institutions.

Would a story like this have made a

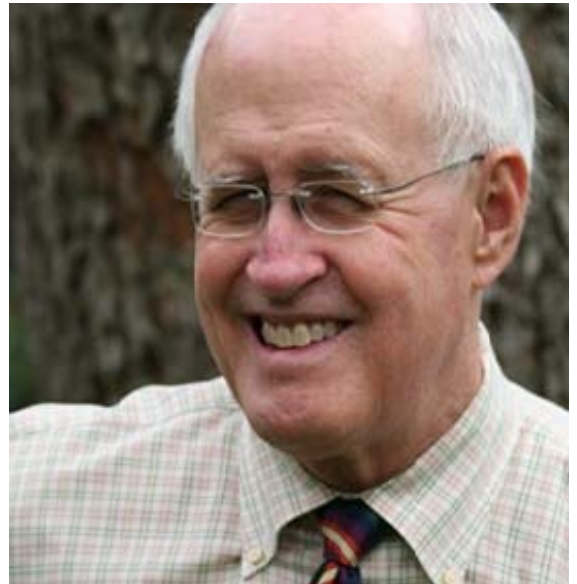
lick of sense in a time when male-female relationships in college came in for firm supervision; on the grounds that supervision of the young and restless was a social duty? That was what social institutions were for – to make sure some basic rules were kept.

"We are afraid," affirmed Edmund Burke, two centuries ago, "to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages."

Accusations of rape, whether false or true, flood the media as 19- and 20-year-olds wade through the moral morass of the "But I Wanta" era, and their elders employ political, as opposed to moral, analysis to the problems that arise in consequence. What are the rules? Are there any rules? Should there be?

Americans squabble over these matters because nothing like cultural unity exists any more. Pretty much everyone, in Burke's words, lives and trades "each on his own private stock of reason." What I say goes! Except when another "I" finds the first "I's" interpretation mischievous, insulting, wrong, whatever. The fighting commences at that point.


You will have guessed by now where this disquisition is headed. The country, the society, suffers immensely from decay of what might be called moral consensus based on Christian teaching. I think we all have to acknowledge that such consensus as we used to have was, um, deficient. Still, it was better at all events than the non-consensus of the "But I Wanta Era." There was at least a predicate to the old consensus: to wit, God had created the heavens and the earth and all that was in them. He had created, in fact, us. What this meant to organizers of our culture, lay as well as clerical, was that humanity owed the Creator deference,



not to say obedience. Christianity supplied the missing parts of the old Stoic/natural law consensus, assigning meaning and purpose to mankind's lot on this earth. The rules that society confected for the living out of life were necessarily grounded not in our own eccentric purposes, but rather in the purposes of the Almighty, the most high and only God. What a difference it made in the inculcation of norms to affirm that we – humanity – were under the direction of an authority larger than that of earthly potentates.

The obligations under that consensus endure, as we know. Community acceptance of those obligations is not as it once was and seems weary, attenuated. Yet the Lord remains in charge, and it may prove that the struggle to preserve society's Christian foundations is not as hopeless as it sometimes seems from close up. If *magna est veritas*, as we are assured, it might be a good idea to give the Author of all Truth a little time to execute His plans.

"But I want it now!" Well, yes, that's the modern way to talk. And what kind of commendation would that amount to?

On the evidence spread so drably before us – not much of one at all. 

*Bill Murchison is a journalist, he lives in Dallas.*

# Pondering and Heartfelt Praise

By David Lyle Jeffrey

“Can any praise be worthy of the Lord’s majesty?” So begins the *Confessions* of Augustine of Hippo.

Given the limitations of the human mind and skill, the answer to this rhetorical question is obviously ‘no.’ Yet, as Augustine immediately points out, there is something profoundly unsatisfactory in this necessary answer. Deep in the human heart stirs an undeniable yearning to praise what is most praiseworthy. What could be found more worthy of our praise than the beauty of Creation and the gift of life itself? Only one gift -- the Lord himself, the Giver of life. Thus, Augustine concludes, we cannot be other than restless in the world until we have found a way to give thanks, to celebrate the glory of the Lord. Before he can finish his meditation on the question he has broken into prayer and praise, addressing now not the reader but God directly, saying “you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.”

What follows in Augustine’s beautiful book is a series of meditations, coupled with self-examination and reflection on his own life. Following his conversion to Christ, he writes in order to understand—and enable us to understand-- the hand of God’s providence in all he has experienced. His book has become a model for a type of Christian meditation we think of as spiritual autobiography, a recollection in gratitude for God’s mercy, for his providence not only in Creation and the life of the world generally, but personally, in one’s own life in particular. As a prototype for such writing, Augustine’s book becomes a ‘confession’ in several senses; he acknowledges his sinful past, including his youthful, self-centered ingratitude, but he also tells gratefully what God has wrought in his life to bring him to spiritual health. At a third level, he declares himself as a Christian, ‘confessing’ the faith of all the Church, all those who have been redeemed of the Lord and ‘say so,’ bearing witness in the world.

That is one model for Christian meditation. There is another, and we find it growing up in the prayer lives of gifted, often visionary, artistic souls, most of whose extant work tends to take the form of deep reflection on the mysteries of the faith, those events in the life of Christ especially which ground and shape the prayer, praise and worship of the Church collectively. Here is where we find the special praise of mystics, spiritual writers, poets and painters, creating, by means of meditation on the life and ministry of Jesus, forms and acts of worship whose beauty is such that we who attend to them are moved ineluctably to praise God not only for his Creation, or for his transformation of a particular life



by grace, but for the tender and loving restoration of all the world to himself through Jesus. In Jesus, God incarnate, born of Mary, we may find a focus for praise of the Lord’s majesty which is less immediately concerned with the self, with what God has done for us, and more devoted simply to God, to the ‘face of God’ revealed in Jesus, his words (*davarim*) and his deeds (*davarim*—in Hebrew effectively the same sound). The desire expressed in such works, whatever their medium, is typically for intimacy with the Lord, especially intimacy in prayer and worship. In great works of Christian art in this vein we find gratitude caught up with joy unspeakable, yet which must speak, lest the very stones cry out. This type of speaking is not usually philosophical; rather, it is often more like the speech of a lover, or of a grateful Beloved, lyrical and effusive. Yet this does not mean, as we shall see, that it lacks theological depth and richness of insight.

Paradoxically, perhaps, these intense and lyrical mediations of the poets and painters can offer us both a form of knowledge and a way of knowing. When we think of how Christians understand the gospels, for example, we readily recognize that reflection on the texts, whether in sermons or biblical commentaries, is helpful to maintaining the narrative as well as theological coherence in which we hold the story of salvation. Because, as Augustine said elsewhere, we pretty much are what we remember; our shared memory



of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, especially in the accounts of Jesus' life in the gospels, forms the identity of an authentically Christian community of faith.

Historically, the poets (including hymn-writers) and painters have had a significant role to play in our corporate understanding of the Scriptures, for they too have been commentators, close readers of the text. Also they are bearers—and shapers—of the shared memory of the Church. On occasion, artists see exquisite details, things of profound spiritual significance that professional commentators and theologians have missed. Often these are intimate insights, observations of the Beloved, reflecting the deeper understanding of a lover who attends not just to command or to a form of argument, but to manner as well as matter, to voice, mood, intonation and inflection, to language of the body as a mirror of the soul.

Such moments of insight and intimacy, I think, can be for us a well-spring of ever more grateful praise. But let us acknowledge that it is the praise itself that God seeks; the form of it, a prayer, a poem, a painting isn't the important thing. Nor, as beautiful as some poems and images are, should we imagine that they are somehow the definition of what is "worthy of the Lord's majesty." We can certainly be helped up to higher ground by G.F. Handel's "Messiah," the 'Annunciation' of Robert Campin, or by Henry Vaughan's exquisite meditation, "The Dwelling Place," but should not think that these great works of art offer definitive answers to Augustine's rhetorical question. When a father or mother receives from the hand of their little child a scrambly crayon impression of who knows what (and is wise enough not to

inquire too deeply), that loving parent does not judge worth by the quality of the execution. So it is, I think, with our heavenly Father; whenever a Handel, Campin or J.S. Bach lays down their best work, *ad maiorem gloriam Dei*, God receives it in love for what most essentially it is, the loving gift of a grateful heart. And—if you will forgive a homely analogy— he hangs it on his fridge.

Not in a disordered worship of art or artists, then, but in gratitude for the Artist who made us variously in his image, each in our own way able to praise his majesty, we should rejoice in the praises of God's people reflected in works for worship at this season of the liturgical year.



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## **Christmas**

*WHEN Mary laid Jesus Christ upon her knees, when she searched him with her eyes, when she fed him at the breast, she did not study to love him because she ought, she loved him because he was dear: he was her Son. His conception had been supernatural, perplexing, affrighting; it had called for faith in the incomprehensible, and obedience beyond the limit of human power. His nativity was human and sweet, and the love with which she embraced it was a natural growth, inseparable from the thing she loved. She was blessed above all creatures, because she loved her Maker inevitably and by simple nature; even though it needed the sword—wounds of the Passion to teach her fully that it was her Maker whom she loved. The Son of Mary is the Son of all human kind; we embrace him with the love of our kind, that we may be led up with Mary to a love beyond kind, a selfless love for the supreme Goodness, when we too shall have climbed the ladder of the cross.*

*Austin Farrer, Crown of the Year*

# Three Score and Ten

*By Fr. Gene Geromel*

My son was in elementary school. After Mass I visited a local nursing home and he came with me. As we walked down the hall he asked, "As a priest, how long does it take to get used to the smell?" "You never get used to it", I replied.

When you think about aging what are your first thoughts? Is this the type of image you have – nasty smells? Is it an image of a nursing home? Someone who has dementia? As life expectancy increases and a larger part of the population ages we see more individuals with dementia or Alzheimer's. Many years ago a study was done about the percentage of those over sixty-five who were in institutions. The researchers discovered that five percent were institutionalized. This included not only nursing homes, but mental institutions, prisons and hospitals.

Look at your own parish family to see how correct these statistics are. My parish has about a hundred and forty souls. This month I have had no one in the hospital. No one from the parish is in prison. I have one person in a home which treats Alzheimer patients. Now, I know I have two other parishioners who have Alzheimer disease but both live at home. In fact, the vast majority of my parishioners sixty-five and over live in their own home.

Brother Lawrence once said, "When I consider how much sin man is capable of, I give thanks to God that there is so little of it." When we consider how many debilitating diseases there are, especially for the elderly, we should give thanks to God that there is so little debilitation in our aging population overall. This is a spiritual perspective which we access much too infrequently. Which brings us to the point of the article: What are the spiritual aspects of aging?

Have you ever noticed that older people talk a great deal about the past. Sometimes we get tired of hearing the same stories. When I was a young priest I remember visiting the oldest member of the congregation. Whenever he started talking about the past I would bring him back to the present or the future. I had this fear that if I allowed him to stay dwell in the past he might stay there. After doing some graduate work in aging I realized that I was doing him a disservice. There is something called the life review. Our whole life is like a giant puzzle and we have to put the pieces together

in order to see the complete picture. When we keep them from talking about the past we keep them from completing the picture of their life. Why not ask them, "Where did you see the hand of God working in your life when that occurred?" "How did God use that experience to make you a better parent or husband?" Our job as fellow Christians

is to remind everyone that God is active in our lives and has blessed us in ways in which we have not noticed or understood.

Are we not expected in our journey of faith to look over our day and recall when God has blessed us and when we have let him down? In Ignatian spirituality it is called the Examin. St. Ignatius of Loyola did the Examin two or three times a day. He began not by looking at his sins but by looking at those things for which he was grateful. (I have often wished that some Christian psychologist would do a study of the life review and how the daily Examin might help this process along.) Looking at what God is doing in our lives and has done in our lives is important for both young and old. Usually we cannot do it entirely by ourselves. We need someone to ask questions and guide us to see God's providence. When an older person begins to speak about the past don't look at it as a burden but as an opportunity to be a minister of Christ.

At a meeting last week I saw a physician try to find the correct word. You could tell he was embarrassed by his inability to say what he wanted to say. If he were in his sixties or seventies those in the room would have wondered if Dr. H was getting too old to lead a meeting. He is in his thirties. The question was never raised.

There is no doubt that as we age there is a diminution of our abilities. Much of it is due to chronic illness. Our bodies do deteriorate. Knees wear out. Eyesight and hearing are not as good as they were once. Yet many older people are able to do things which younger people are unable to do. I have one parishioner who in her eighties who would run three to five miles three times a week. I know twenty and thirty year olds who cannot run a mile. Is there any young priest in Forward in Faith who would like to debate Bishop Parsons?

Don't get me wrong. The older we get the more likely it is that we will have chronic illness. We will suffer losses which are difficult to overcome and seem to take the spirit out of



people. Aging isn't for sissies, as a former prime minister of Israel once put it. Many of the great Saints lived with great pain and suffering. Ignatius of Loyola would roll on the floor because of his gall and kidney stones. His leg, which had been shattered by a canon ball in his youth, constantly hurt. St. Alphonsus Ligouri sat in a chair paralyzed. Yet he continued to direct the order he founded. He dictated his books to his monks. On one level, the spiritual level, illness and limitations are a reminder that we are going to die. How we prepare for death is very important to how we live.

If you have ever read Pope John XXIII book, *Journal of a Soul*, you will see that he mentions his death frequently. This

book is a collection of his retreat notes. As a young priest he contemplated his own death and as a very old Pope he reflected on his death. When his Doctor had to tell the Pope that he was dying the physician burst into tears, Pope John put his arm around the Doctor and said, "It's ok, my bags are packed."



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## Unroll the Scroll

*Fr. David Mathus on a novel approach to Adult Christian Education*

The parish was looking for a new topic for Adult Ed when one parishioner mentioned that his Western Civ class in college gave him a good background in the secular world, but he was having trouble integrating Biblical history into that; could we do something about that? We could, and we did, and the study turned out to be worthwhile on several levels.

I wanted the parishioners to be involved in the learning, not merely as a passive audience. So we set up a format of lay people researching and presenting a given era in secular history, followed by the priest, the next week, summarizing what was happening in the Biblical world at the time. To keep the information organized, we took a roll of shelf paper and drew a horizontal line down the middle, dividing it into upper and lower halves, and created a timeline. The scale was one millimeter to the year and we started at 3000 BC for context; anticipating that we might someday want to extend into Church history (which we will start in January 2015), the timeline is 5 meters long (to AD 2000). Events of secular history are entered below the timeline, and events of Biblical history are above the timeline; in this way we have a visual reminder of how various events relate. Because some of the parishioners are particularly involved and interested in Native American affairs, we include special mention of events in North America as well as the usual empires, wars, and decrees of Euro-Asian history. The timeline was then attached at each end to dowel rods to make a scroll; what better way to represent Biblical events?

Our scroll is long and unwieldy, so it is kept partially rolled on a table next to where our study group gathers. It is easy to unroll it a bit to look back or look ahead, but a glance suffices to refresh memories of the particular period we are currently studying. We started out doing 500 years at a time; in very early history that could be summarized neatly in an hour. By the time we got to New Testament times, however, we found that events were so compressed that there was barely room to get them all in, and a single decade could easily take several weeks. That in itself is instructive: as we read the Bible, a book (or even a chapter) might span decades, even centuries, or, on the other hand, might cover only days or hours. Yet as we read, each is still just a chapter; it subtly conditions us to assume that equal

time spans are covered.

One of the first questions that came up, as we looked at our new scroll, was where dinosaurs would fit in. It was astounding to realize that, as far as our scroll stretched, it would need to go an additional 40 miles to the left to get back far enough to encompass merely the end of the age of dinosaurs; the beginning of that era would be several states away! (Remember, we live in the East; in Texas that might be the next county.) Almost immediately there were questions of overlap: an event in secular history influenced an event in

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Biblical history, or vice versa; which side of the line should it go on? There was lots of discussion, bringing out more details of events, leading to a group decision. Everyone grew.

For visual learners our scroll adds a dimension beyond maps and paintings and photographs; for those well versed in Western Civilization in college, the Biblical story added a new dimension. As we use the daily and Sunday lectionaries, people have referred to the scroll to see where in history various prophets and writers fit in. The scroll gives a new context for viewing and understanding events, and all have grown in their understanding of the lessons. Even sermons have benefitted; references can be made to the scroll and the events it records, and people can then, at coffee time, go look them up.

In the new year we will continue the format of alternating secular and theological events, although there will be less separation between the two, and the study promises to continue to deepen our understanding of and commitment to the faith we all share. The lessons are not just something we hear, but connect with a host of other events and issues; the creeds are not just something we say (or can alter at will), but historical statements that summarize the faith once for all delivered to the saints. And we will have the scroll forever.



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# Epiphany

*By Bishop Ray Sutton*

Pastor Stephey Bilynskyj starts each confirmation training class with a jar full of beans. He asks his students to guess how many beans are in the jar, and on a big pad of paper writes down their estimates. Then, next to those estimates, he helps them make another list: Their favorite songs. When the lists are complete, he reveals the actual number of beans in the jar. The whole class looks over their guesses, to see which estimate was closest to being right. Bilynskyj then turns to the list of favorite songs. "And which one of these is closest to being right?" he asks. The students protest that there is no "right answer"; a person's favorite song is purely a matter of taste. Bilynskyj, who holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from Notre Dame asks, "When you decide what to believe in terms of your faith, is that more like guessing the number of beans, or more like choosing your favorite song?" Always, Bilynskyj says, from old as well as young, he gets the same answer: Choosing one's faith is more like choosing a favorite song. (As told by Tim Stafford):

"Quite astonishing I know, but all too characteristic of a false notion: faith and knowledge are disconnected. The students in Pastor Bilynski's class have indicated that religion is simply a matter of personal favoritism similar to choosing a song. But is that true? Does faith not have to do with knowledge and objective reality? The Gospel for this Sunday reveals an epiphany moment in the life of Jesus that teaches quite a relationship between faith and



knowledge."

One of the Gospel stories with which we begin our new year is the story of Jesus as a young man in the Temple. Luke records the story for us (2:41ff.). Jesus had travelled with his parents to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. When it was over the family left, but Jesus stayed. Mom and dad assumed that Jesus was with family members. They discovered instead that little Jesus was missing. They returned to Jerusalem only to discover that the Lord was in the Temple pursuing knowledge from the Rabbis. Our passage says that Jesus was both "hearing and asking them questions. All were astonished at his answers."

The text also states, importantly, that he was about twelve, typically the

time in a human's life when intense questioning begins. The famous mystery writer and Professor of Classics at Oxford, Dorothy Sayers, once wrote an important essay on education called, *The Lost Tools of Learning*. She described how Christian education in the Middle Ages developed a model of learning called the *Trivium*. The *Trivium* consisted of three parts: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Phase one of the Medieval model of Christian education began with grammar, learning the foundational abc's of reading and arithmetic. The second phase of learning very interestingly was called the teaching of logic, which was to start when the young person was around 10-12 years old. The presumption was that this is when young people begin to


question everything. So why not teach them Aristotle's system of logic so that they learn to think. Importantly, logic used to be part of every person's education. The third phase of Medieval learning was rhetoric, teaching how to communicate one's knowledge through writing and speaking.

For Jesus in the temple, faith and knowledge are connected in two ways. First by asking and listening he reveals that it takes faith to understand. He not only asked but he listened. He would not have listened and heard if there was not faith. And this faith was necessary to know. One of the four Doctors of the Church, Augustine, said in the fourth century, "Believe so that you may understand." Faith precedes understanding. Once upon a time a famous professional golfer, long before he was famous, named Lee Trevino, told me when I was about 14 years old, "If you learn how to hit a pitching wedge you can hit any club." He mostly practiced day-in and day-out, hitting

the pitching wedge. He was telling me to do the same. I did but initially I had to take him by faith at his word before I learned that what he said was quite true. Belief precedes true knowledge. This is true as well with God. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why most the great universities in the history of the world were started by Christians.

Second, by asking questions Jesus reveals that true faith seeks knowledge. A famous medieval Archbishop of Canterbury named Anselm built on the teaching of Scripture and Augustine's insight about believing to understand. Anselm expressed this amazing insight by his famous slogan, "Faith seeking knowledge." In other words, Anselm observed that true faith pursues knowledge. Not only are faith and knowledge not in conflict, real faith seeks to know. True faith asks questions because one has to ask to learn, to know, to find the answer. If a person doesn't care about God, he never wants to know. But if he has true faith

he wants to learn about the Lord. True faith not only precedes knowledge as Augustine taught, it seeks knowledge as Anselm instructed. And this is why and how an epiphany occurs.

If Jesus had an epiphany, that is he learned, and he gave others an epiphany as he grew in wisdom and stature, then so must we. We must believe and we must seek to know more about the Lord. In this coming year we should commit anew to catechesis and a better understanding of the faith. I heartily commend the new catechism for ACNA. As St. Augustine once said, "God does not expect us to submit our faith to him without reason, but the very limits of our reason make faith a necessity." Let us do both. Let us believe and let us seek to understand. Let us have a true epiphany of Christ in 2015. Amen. 

*Bishop Ray Sutton is Bishop Coadjutor in the Diocese of Mid-America of the Reformed Episcopal Church. He lives in Dallas, Texas.*

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### *The Epiphany Sequence*

Let us duly magnify  
This renown'd Epiphany,  
To the Child of God to-day  
Wise men rightful homage pay.  
Whom, immeasurably great,  
Chaldee sages venerate,  
To Whose coming, man to save.  
All the prophets witness gave :  
His majestic throne on high, —  
Such His great humility, —  
He refused not to forsake.  
And a servant's form to take ;  
God from all eternity,  
Ere the world began to be,  
He was man of Mary made :

Whom predicting Balaam said, —  
Out of Jacob, seen from far,  
There shall come a flaming star,  
Which with power shall smite the host  
Of Moab to his utmost coast.  
Him their costly offering,  
Gold, myrrh, incense, wise men bring.  
God, sweet incense ; precious gold  
A King 5 myrrh doth a Man unfold :  
Angel-warned, no word they bring  
Back to Herod, ruthless king,  
Fearing much, in rage and hate,  
He should lose his royal state.

Lo ! the star before them went,  
Homeward on their journey bent,  
Glad they seek their native land,  
Heeding not the king's command.  
Madden 'd with exceeding ire  
Forth he sends the mandate dire  
Throughout Bethlehem's coasts to seek  
And to slay the infants meek.  
Now the choir their voice unite.  
Organs swell with mystic rite,  
Bringing to the King of kings.  
Praise and costly offerings.  
O'er all kingdoms, o'er all lands  
May He spread His sheltering hands.  
Ever present to defend,  
Unto worlds that never end.

# The Bethlehem Way

By Fr. Donald Richmond

With Eliot's Magi, many of us may have had "a cold coming of it" over the past few months. When we consider the state of our nation and our world, the overall "mystery of iniquity" and its fallout, we might be prone to despair. Yet, as we know, this path has been traveled before -- and that by our Savior and saints throughout history.

Alternately called *The Hard Path* or *The Road to Bethlehem*, Fritz von Uhde's visual narrative provides important messages for today's weary Advent pilgrim. In his graphical text we see a husband and wife traveling to an unknown destination. The horizon is wrapped in a blue-gray fog with only the very slightest hint of sunshine peeking through the thick morass. To the right there is a low and empty table, and to the left is an unwelcoming house. The trees are stark, a long row of seasonal reminders.

Both are ill-dressed for such weather, and the wife is clearly worn by the long journey. They have few belongings beyond the clothes on their backs; an empty rucksack, the bare frame of his vocation, a staff, and a covered pot in the wife's right hand. Together they move through the center of a ragged and wet, wagon-worn, trail. The husband, turned to his bride, exudes both concern and compassion.

In spite of its depressive frame, gray-blues and dirt-browns with a greenish tinge, *The Hard Path* is hopeful. Although everything is shrouded, a hint of sunshine is suggested. Although the table and the house are stark and bare, they provide points of perspective and possibility. Although it is seasonally wet, waters are running with a hint of spring thaw. Although the couple own few things, they have each other. Compassion and companionship dominate the painting.

Our hard path, as theirs, is our common road to God's promise fulfilled. At times our road may be dark, with little hint of sunshine. And yet the sun shines strong and will eventually prevail. Socio-psycho-pneumatic poverty may dominate much of our lives, but there is always the assurance of God's "now" and "then" kingdom. While at



times the table may be bare and the house may appear unwelcoming, we enjoy a perpetual Table-feast in the House of God. We have each other, the incarnation of "Christ within us" as demonstrated through both compassion and companionship.

Uhde's holy couple moves on. So must we. Although our nation and world may impose a hard path upon us, a veritable Via Dolorosa, this road is always a road to Bethlehem.

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*The Very Rev. Donald Richmond is a Oblate in the Order of St. Benedict and a priest in the Reformed Episcopal Church.*

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## *O Rex Gentium*

O King of the nations, and their desire,  
the cornerstone making both one:  
Come and save the human race,  
which you fashioned from clay.



# July 13-17, 2015

## It's time to do the Texas Two-Step!

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