

# Truth and Reconciliation

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## BIBLICAL BEGINNINGS

My first seventeen years were spent in the Bible Belt, in rural Illinois. My family were members of the Disciples of Christ. My grandfather, great uncle, second cousin, and aunt were all ministers. The Bible was our text, and we knew that our assignment was to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it.” There were cradle-to-grave bible classes, meeting every Sunday to plow their way through age-appropriate syllabi. Children learned memory verses every week. Our earliest songs included “Jesus loves me, this I know; for the bible tells me so” and “the B-I-B-L-E, yes that’s the book for me; I stand alone on the Word of God, the B-I-B-L-E!” Youth groups were drilled until they knew the books of the Bible in order. There were games and quizzes on bible facts. Older members pondered the meanings, shared insights, and worked all week long to knead the words of Scripture into the stuff of their lives. I count love of the Bible and a thorough familiarity with its text among the greatest gifts of my childhood.

In those country churches, biblical hermeneutics were not so much literalistic as “plain sense” and harmonizing. Although liberal ministers in my family read the then-new Interpreters’ Bible and favored the RSV, conservatives defended the King James Version and took creation stories to be incompatible with evolution. Readings were mostly uninfluenced by academic scholarship, but they were shaped by lifelong study and minute reflection. If they had understood the question, all would have said that the Bible was the Word of God and the primary locus of authority for Christians. The Disciples of Christ was part of the Restoration Movement, which aimed to return to the primitive church and to shed accumulated distortions. Creeds were rejected as “man-made.” “Tradition” and “the church fathers” were never mentioned. I learned about Methuselah, but I never heard of Augustine, Anselm, or Aquinas. Polity was congregational. The priesthood of all believers was affirmed in the sense that each Christian had the right and the obligation to study God’s Word, to

pray through it, and to make up their own minds about its meaning. Likewise, not the preacher but lay elders presided at the Lord's Supper. We summed up our position in song and slogan: "No creed but Christ; no book but the Bible; no name but the Divine. In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; and in all things, love."

### EXPERIENCING THE GOODNESS

In Bible Belt religion, experience was also emphasized. There were revivals, tent meetings, altar calls, and dramatic conversions. Midwestern culture can be sentimental, and there was considerable focus on feelings. As a child, I did not have a Damascus Road conversion. Rather I experienced the reality of God as given as much as green grass and blue skies. Unlike corn on the cob, which was best in August, God was omnipresent like the air. I found the bigness of Divine Goodness utterly convincing. The reality of Jesus was a given, too, although the metaphysics of Christology was left vague. Jesus was confessed as "God's Son." I did not know how to ask whether that was adoptionist or Arian. What was clear was that Jesus shared the Divine property of being omn-accessible, there when you need Him; likewise, that Jesus is the Savior Who loves us. As a child, I did not believe in God and Jesus simply because adults told me so. I had—so I thought—tasted and seen corroborating realities, the way I had felt the wind and smelled the flowers. The testimony of experience and community joined to convince me in ways I could never fully escape that nothing could be more important than one's personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This was by far the greatest gift of my childhood.

### ENTERING THE ABYSS

Moving through childhood toward adolescence, however, I faced realities of a different kind. My parents' home was chaotic, conflicted, and violent. By some time in grade school, I was the target of relentless physical and psychological abuse. Though mostly unconsciously deployed, their methods were textbook. Not only was I scapegoated, blamed, and beaten for things that were not my fault. Not only was I sexually molested. Not only did my parents take every opportunity to detail my faults to adults I respected. Not only did they "damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't" my academic accomplishments. Not only did they put up obstacles to my maintaining peer friendships. My parents constantly ridiculed my religious attachments. I was a hypocrite. How could anyone as bad as I was, sincerely claim to be a Christian? They targeted my principal hold on meaning and purpose. Their determined effort to cut me off from God, from my personal relationship with Jesus Christ, was the cruelest of the many things they did.

In those Cold War days, the Sunday School thought experiment was this: When the Russians roll down the street with tanks, will you renounce your faith under torture? I was thirteen years old when I caved in. The cognitive dissonance was too much for me. I stood in the basement in front of the washing machine I was loading and ritualized my divorce from God by damning the Holy Spirit. In those days when family violence was unspeakable, I couldn't say, and I wouldn't have been believed if I had explained, what was really wrong. Neither were the mostly well-meaning ministers and teachers in our village equipped to cope with my easily reinvented head-trip objections to the Bible, to miracles, yes, to the very existence of God.

The more vivid my confrontation with evil became, the more my sense of the reality of God faded. Mounting and sustained abuse angered me. Looking back, I can see how the emotional static screened God out. On the surface, I didn't believe in God. But deeper down, I felt betrayed and abandoned by God. If I was so bad, why didn't the Savior come and help me learn to be good? Deep down, I felt that God hated me. My anger swelled, and I hated God back.

So, Scripture and experience set the theological agenda for the rest of my life. I had eaten of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. I had tasted and seen the bigness of the Goodness, and—until I left for university right after high school graduation—I swallowed daily cups of poison. My problem was how to house God and evil in the same world, and how to contain the experiences of God and horrors within the same self.

## THE EXISTENTIALISTS

My first encounter with philosophy came when an out-of-town minister prescribed Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as the cure for my religious doubts. I duly ordered the book from the state library and read it without understanding a word. My first encounter with theology came the following summer when I squandered my life savings of \$75 to attend a six-week engineering program at the University of Illinois. The dorm counselor told us about Paul Tillich, and I rushed to the bookstore to find shelves of existentialist theology for under a dollar per volume. I devoured *The Shaking of the Foundations* with its reassuring note—"Accept the fact that you are accepted!"—as well as *The Dynamics of Faith* and *The Courage to Be*. I requested his *Systematic Theology* as a graduation present. When I got to university (in the summer of 1961), I took a course on contemporary religious thought that featured Bultmann, Buber, and Niebuhr. I pored over Kierkegaard, gulping down cups of bad coffee at the YMCA.

My attraction is easy to explain. Existentialist theologians began with my questions about the meaning and purpose of life and brought issues about what is at stake between us and God into the middle of their answers. Tillich's

definition of “faith” as “ultimate concern for the ultimate” resonated. So did neo-orthodox pessimism about human nature. I was surprised and delighted to find that I was not alone in these struggles. There was company, smart and articulate company, that had written at length on these subjects. I eagerly read and pondered what they had to say. In my efforts to assess Bultmann, I even wrote my senior thesis on Heidegger to discover whether it was an apt conceptual framework for expressing the Christian gospel.

In the end, a variety of factors turned me away from the existentialists. The first was the sense that Heideggerian conceptuality was not apt. My primal anxiety was not about death, but about something worse: the fear that God hated me. The second was the anti-realist spin that many were putting on, e.g., Tillich’s theory of religious symbols. Discussion-group leaders regularly spoke of going with “whichever metaphors work for you.” However distorted their construals, I knew that I wasn’t interested in adopting mere metaphors. Religious experience had convinced me of what it could never prove: that God is too big to be a social construction. What I wanted was to get back in touch with the reality of God. However philosophically underdeveloped the Christology of my childhood religion, the theologically reductive historical-Jesus and higher-critical accounts didn’t fit the Jesus I had known and loved either. I had experienced Jesus *as God* without knowing how to theorize it.

Moreover, while the philosophy department at the University of Illinois was pluralistic and weighted toward history, analytic philosophy was growing in prominence. I was drawn into Bill Wainwright’s and Nelson Pike’s use of analytical methods to treat the problem of evil. I also discovered medieval philosophy, which was both analytical and systematic. Despite Norman Kretzmann’s efforts to turn it into philosophy of language, I spied in it an extensive literature in which theology set the syllabus for philosophy.

## THE ANGLO-CATHOLICS

Amidst the array of thriving campus religious foundations at the University of Illinois in the early sixties, I could find only three groups that were metaphysical realists: the Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, which was too much like my childhood religion that had left me in the lurch; the Roman Catholics, whose commitment to papal infallibility was a definite and permanent non-starter; and the Anglo-Catholics, whose quarters faced the philosophy department from directly across the street. Henry Johnson, the priest who was running their graduate discussion group, was taking philosophy classes toward his Ph.D. in philosophy of education. Father “J” invited me to join in.

For me, these Anglo-Catholics embodied a liberating version of faith seeking understanding. They were intellectually flexible enough to tolerate questioning. Because their practice centered on worshipping a mystery, Anglo-

Catholics appreciated both our need to articulate what we experienced and the ultimate inadequacy of our attempts to grasp what is infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. They saw doctrinal formulations as partial and incomplete, to be worked and reworked through life. They also recognized how questioning and disputing are one way we put on the mind of Christ, one approach to integrating Christ into the whole persons that we are.

At least as liberating was the Anglo-Catholic focus on “objective” disciplines. My childhood religion emphasized feelings and claimed biblical authority for the warning: you’re a liar to say you love God when you don’t love your neighbor from your heart. But I was too messed up inside to have the approved feelings toward God and neighbor. In those years before pop-psychology, I didn’t have a clue about how to clean up my internal act. The Anglo-Catholics taught that actions “count” whether or not the feelings are there. Feelings are not under my direct voluntary control, but I can put my body in the pew and form my mouth around the words. I can open the Bible or the Book of Common Prayer and read it. I eagerly welcomed the notion that God would take liturgical participation or fasting from meat on Friday as a friendly gesture, whether or not one had the right feelings.

The Anglo-Catholics explained that this did not have to be hypocrisy, because human beings are multidimensional. The inside and outside, conscious and unconscious, can be out of phase. The outside trains the outside toward Christ, even if the inside has a long way to go to catch up. Neither does repetition have to be vain; athletic workouts are a must, even for champions. Daily mass is there because we need to eat every day, and because we need to rehearse what is at stake between God and us, until it centers our daily lives.

More radical still was the hint that transformation could work from the outside in, that it could begin to reform our identities in advance of their being fully integrated. Liturgical participation is subversive: taking in the Body and Blood of Christ creates an imbalance in the self. Keep doing it, and comes the revolution, in which the personality will be recentered around friendship with Christ. And this was—despite the ambivalence planted by my encounters with evil—my heart’s deepest desire.

The Anglo-Catholics introduced me to the idea that religious commitment should be normed by tradition—for them the ecumenical creeds and conciliar pronouncements were regulative. Following the Oxford Movement, they delved into patristic theology, somewhat to the neglect of the philosophically more rigorous medieval thinkers. Keble, Newman, and Pusey were their heroes. Later I was appalled by the conservative political thrust of the Oxford Movement (what American could countenance denying the vote to Roman Catholics?). But at the time, so much was new to me that I was splashing in an ocean of theological stimulation.

Anglo-Catholicism also forwards what I eventually regarded as a rigid ecclesiology. From the beginning, they explained that they and the Roman

Catholics were the only western churches with a valid ministry, that only clergy who were episcopally ordained by bishops in the apostolic succession could preside over valid sacraments. They also opposed the ordination of women on traditional grounds (and because it would burn bridges with Rome). In the medium run, these ideas could not stand up in the face of my Presbyterian husband and in-laws who obviously had effective ministries. In the long run, I had to break ranks when I was ordained.

In the beginning, however, the Anglo-Catholics were a safe house. They welcomed me. They put up with my heckling head-trip questions and objections to Augustine's arguments, until one day in the library I found myself overwhelmed by the reality of God. Moving fifty miles away to college had yanked me out of a hostile home environment and immersed me in intellectual work. Without constant provocation, the emotional static began to clear. When I was not studying, I was scouting for a context where I could recover my faith. The Anglo-Catholics helped me do that. I was overjoyed at the breakthrough. The Anglo-Catholics also helped me articulate my recovery and direct its energy. I was confirmed as an Episcopalian in May 1964. In their view, I could not be ordained, but I could become a theologian.

For years, I self-identified as an Anglo-Catholic. It became second nature to norm myself by ecumenical creeds and councils. Much later, during the LGBT controversies at Yale, someone challenged, "Professor Adams, your opponents have a rule of faith. Do *you* have a rule of faith?" I replied matter-of-factly to their dissatisfaction, "Of course. The Nicene Creed!" Equally influential on my theology has been the eucharistic piety into which the Anglo-Catholics initiated me. Almost fifty years of experience have made me a strong advocate of religious formation through material cult.

## MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

The Anglo-Catholics encouraged me to pursue theology. My philosophy professors warned that mid-twentieth-century theology was methodologically at sea. Moreover, I had no money to fund theological education, while graduate school in philosophy was in those days a free ride. Graduate school in philosophy took me away from the existential questions that troubled me most. But in retrospect, I think the detour was necessary for me. I needed the rigor and discipline that analytic philosophy built into me. The Cornell Ph.D. program was scant in content but riveted on method: "truth, profundity, clarity; but the greatest of these is clarity!" We learned how to draw distinctions and how to be concise. These intellectual skills are important, not only in philosophy, but also in theology. Analytical precision and economy of expression have also made me a more accurate listener and a better preacher.

Cornell is also where I met and married Robert Merrihew Adams (in 1966). We were the only Christian students in the philosophy Ph.D. program. We courted over discussions of the Chalcedonian definition and other issues in patristic theology, which Bob had mastered “reading” theology at Oxford. His strength of character and firm faith have provided the stability and safety I needed to wrestle with God and to venture many things.

When I first arrived at Cornell in the fall of 1964, the department was in the last gasps of Wittgensteinian dominance. Syllabi were otherwise crammed with varieties of empiricism, including repeated doses of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. To put it mildly, the ideological climate was unpromising for making progress in understanding God and evil. My way forward was pointed by Nelson Pike’s regular recourse to medieval philosophical theologians, when analyzing problems about the attributes of God. Here I found mentors and conversation partners, thinkers who turned high-powered philosophical expertise to the syllabus of theology. I could not see myself simply buying into their transmogrified neo-Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics (although I certainly find it more congenial overall than Hegelian and neo-Kantian approaches). Nevertheless, I reckoned early on that if I could figure out how medieval systems worked and discover how their methods integrated philosophy and theology, I would be well prepared for my own constructive projects. At twenty, I radically underestimated how long such “ground-work” would take.

The result was that I became, among other things, a medievalist. I have no regrets. Studying Anselm, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham has taught me many things. First and foremost, I learned that *philosophy is and ought to be the backbone of theology*. Theologians need explicitly to take responsibility for their philosophical commitments. They should not be allowed to get by with half-baked, underdigested philosophical allusions. Second, I took from scholastic method the highly pertinent lessons that *questioning and disputing authority is not impudent insubordination but a tool of analysis* and that *vigorous disagreement is not inherently dangerous but—among fallible human beings—serves as a winnowing fork and an instrument for discovering the truth*. Most important for me was Anselm’s example, making explicit how *theology is something you do with your whole self*. Between birth and the grave, the human assignment is to strive into God with all of our powers. For Anselm, that meant subjecting the will to monastic disciplines, training the emotions through spiritual exercises, and sharpening the mind by questioning and disputing authority. Each and all of the powers need training and coordination. This dynamic, played out in the *Proslogion*, brought me to another fundamental insight: that *doing philosophy and theology is itself a kind of prayer*. Anselm’s job is energetic articulation that presses questions and objections. Then he pauses and awaits the Inner Teacher’s “aha” disclosure, which Anselm then tries to formulate, only to question and dispute all over

again. Theology is something you do with your whole self, but it is not a solo act. We are designed to function in collaboration with the Inner Teacher. Whether conscious or unconscious, insight is always the fruit of our functional partnership with God.

Even when their Aristotle is mostly bracketed, medievals have much to offer where theological emphasis and content are concerned. Key for me was the way my favorite five scholastics—Anselm, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham—appreciate what I call “the Metaphysical Size Gap”: God as immeasurably excellent is in a different ontological category from creatures, and yet is still a “personal” agent who acts by thought and will to do one thing rather than another in the created order. To my mind, analytic philosophers of religion make an idol of morality, insisting that God’s perfect goodness must be moral goodness, and maintaining that we have rights against God who has obligations to us. By contrast, my favorite five were unanimous that God is too big to be networked to us by rights and obligations. Franciscans put morality in its place with their verdict: even if we were morally perfect, Divine love for us would be utterly gratuitous. “Who are we that He should show, such great love to us below?” Even from a negative angle, my existential issues with God were never that God had violated my rights (as my parents arguably had), but that God had raised expectations and inspired trust, only seemingly to abandon and betray me.

Oddly, my favorite five scholastics did not draw the converse conclusion from the Metaphysical Size Gap: that we are too small to have moral obligations to God. The anchorite Julian of Norwich (my sixth favorite) stands alone in forwarding an anthropology that relocates us in relation to Divine agency, not as adult defendants before the great judgment seat of Christ, but as infants and children who need help and discipline. I continue to find encouragement in her conception that sin is at bottom not rebellion but incompetence, and in her estimate that the worst scourge is being the dysfunctional sinners that we are.

Equally inspiring for me was the Franciscan motif of the primacy of Christ. The religion of my childhood had been Jesus-centered. But Franciscan philosophical theologians put this into cosmic perspective. Not only is the Incarnation not plan “B,” regretfully adopted to solve the sin-problem; God-with-us is God’s purpose in creation. Christ is the primary reason why God created anything at all!

## GATHERING UP THE FRAGMENTS

Normally and naturally, Manichaean experience of God and of horrors fragments the self. Both realities are seared into the soul. But the unconscious fear is that Evil will swallow up the Good. It is one thing to doubt or



deny the existence of God intellectually. But terror attends the prospect of erasing all experiential memory of really present Goodness. “Splitting off” is a solution, closeting memory of the Good to protect it from encounters with the devouring Bad. Unconscious memory of really present Goodness is important, because—whatever else the conscious self might think and feel, no matter what other contents the unconscious self might manage—memory-prints of Goodness fuel hope that what you see is not all you get and energize the demand to be better, to do better, and to make things better. Normally and naturally, Manichaean experience sets up a parallel polarity between love and hate, and commonly triggers the “split-off” of one from the other. Parts of me still loved God and knew that God was all I ever wanted. Other parts vehemently hated God for being dead-beat at best and treacherous at worst. Locking up the love is important, because it guards against the horror of becoming a hater through and through.

The truth, as I came eventually to see it, is that memory-prints and desires are not all we have left. Really present Goodness did not go away. God was and is omnipresent. God’s real presence, like the memory of it, just went underground. Abandonment is metaphysically impossible—nothing could be or do anything if God were not there—and so merely apparent. To extend Anselm’s view, this is because the Inner Teacher partners with us in all of our personal functioning, not just in generating intellectual insights. Most of the time, we are not conscious of God’s presence and influences. But whether or not we recognize it, we are working together, and *God is there*. This means that it is not merely memory prints, but really present Godhead Itself that grounds our hope.

Normally, therapists and spiritual directors see fragmentation as a temporary defense that eventually needs to be undone through a process of bringing salient pieces up to consciousness and letting them “talk to each other.” Before my midlife crisis, I lacked such pop-psychological knowledge of human dynamics. So much in church and society sent the message “Just suck it up and function!” After four years at the University of Michigan, we had moved to UCLA with tenure (in 1972). When I was not teaching, I spent waking hours writing my two-volume book on Ockham’s philosophical theology. I attended daily mass at the Anglo-Catholic parish a mile away from our house. But God seemed distant, even abstract like the federal government that knows all about you and provides certain services but can’t be greeted face-to-face.

I remained “on hold” for about six years, when an uncertain medical diagnosis got my attention. Death might be imminent. Time to take stock. I joined a prayer group. We took our 1979–1980 sabbatical in Princeton, where my father-in-law, then dean of the seminary, really was dying. I met my first spiritual director, A. Orley Swartzentruber, rector of All Saints’ parish, Old Testament scholar, and ex-Mennonite missionary. His penetrating biblical preaching convinced me that he could midwife the reconnections and help me

recover my personal relationship with Jesus Christ. So the internal inventory began.

Orley was influenced by the charismatic movement that stressed the healing of memories. First, one recovered the memory, then one reimagined the scene with Jesus present in it, with others praying for healing all the while. Certainly, bringing the unspeakable into community with others, along with one's sense of abandonment and betrayal, cancels the sense of isolation. Moreover, in relation to God, the exercise is an act of candor and so a gesture of trust. The point of the reimagining is to trigger a deep-level *experience* of the fact that God did not go AWOL, that God was really present in one's hour of need. Charismatic rhetoric often commended the healing of memories as if it were a "quick fix." Sometimes, such deep-structure putting two and two together happened suddenly and dramatically. Other times, the exercises and prayers were a step in a much longer complicated process. As my friend and teacher Jim Loder, a professor of Christian education at Princeton Theological Seminary, emphasized: even when the existential "aha" comes all of a sudden, its implications have to be worked through piecemeal, setting it against fragment after fragment until it saturates and reorganizes the self. Happily, Orley himself appreciated the long-haul nature of the project. The five years of work we did together did not finish the course, but they were foundational for the rest of my life.

*Theology is something you do with your whole self, but—in the rough and tumble of this world—you cannot wait to do it until your self is whole.* Among other things, a theologian volunteers to be a laboratory where she labors with God to accomplish God's transforming work. The theologian's job is to initiate, reciprocate, and cooperate. The theologian's task is also to watch and articulate how God saves and to map the twists and turns and obstacles on the way to becoming whole. Put otherwise, *theology is read "off the gut."* What guards against what Anglo-Catholics called "the caprice of private interpretation" is that theology is read "off the gut" *through the lens of Scripture and tradition and within the context of community.*

## HOLLYWOOD DEBUT

Midlife crisis reacquainted me with my early sense of vocation to ordained ministry. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it proved much more difficult for me to get into the Episcopal church process and to clear its hurdles than it was to get a Ph.D. Rebuffed on first attempt, I decided to go to Princeton Theological Seminary anyway. Even if I didn't win a plastic collar, I could at least learn many things I wanted to know. By teaching the winter and spring quarters and attending seminary in the summer and fall (in 1983 and 1984), I was able to get two Th.M.s, with coursework evenly divided between Bible and

psychology-spirituality. Twin degrees in hand, I wasn't simply going back to fishing, so I accepted then-rector David Duncan's invitation to jump-start adult education at Trinity parish in Los Angeles..

I didn't know that David had also brought in Bill Leason, an openly gay priest whose day job was bilingual education in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, and that gay men were flocking to our church in the wake of the AIDS epidemic. Orley and the charismatics had been vigorous in their insistence that LGBT lifestyles were incompatible with holy living. Getting real with myself, I had to admit that sexuality is a hard subject. There was nothing to do but keep my eyes and ears open. We were in emergency mode, and I had a pastor's privilege of close-range observation. I learned a lot. I observed that LGBT relationships, and the partners that peopled them, were not perfect. *And* the same was true of the heterosexual couples I knew. I saw how anti-LGBT taboos produced a lot of confusion among people who were trying hard to find ways to give and receive love. I saw sacrificial love and faithfulness persevering to the end. I saw God-with-us at work in the midst of horrendous suffering. My conclusion was that taboos are cruel and that the Church should have nothing to do with them. Taboos are social barriers erected out of fear that society will come unraveled. But fear is not what glues the Church together. What guarantees the Church's integrity is the Holy Spirit of God!

Working with returning LGBT at Trinity Hollywood was one of the greatest privileges of my life. I, who had been estranged from God for decades, who still deep down hated the God who abandons people to horrendous harm, found myself preaching God's unconditional love and unfailing solidarity, God-with-us in the worst that we can suffer, be, or do. I advertised Divine eagerness to enter into conversation with us on whichever basis we are able to start. I could not begin, as Orley had, with sin and repentance. In childrearing, discipline should be based on love. But our congregation was awash in social hate. Someone summed up my aim and proudest accomplishment: "The more I hear you talk about God, the more I like God!"

Secretly, I wondered where I got all that. I make it a rule never to preach anything I don't believe. But my sermons were so much more optimistic than my own conscious struggles let on. My conclusion was that really present Godhead had been cultivating core familiarity, teaching me about Itself all along. This learning had remained out of sight, because I hadn't been able to manage the cognitive dissonance. The urgent need of people living and dying with HIV/AIDS pulled it out of me and compelled me to proclaim the Good News of God's love in articulate speech.

I was ordained at Trinity Hollywood in 1987. Equally important, I became an honorary gay person, a member of the LGBT tribe. They were my people, and I could not afterwards deny the miracles I had seen among them. Certainly, I am as fallible as the next Christian. *But to lie about what one has seen God*

*doing is the greatest blasphemy and forfeits all reason for being.* My experience made me an LGBT activist. I could not fail to bear witness to Orley and Jim (whom I did not convince) and the charismatics (who anathematized me). Later, when I left Los Angeles for Yale in 1993, I vowed to take the perspective of the margins to the heart of the establishment. Sure enough, I had my chance: my ten years at Yale-Berkeley Divinity School saw, not one, but three virulent LGBT controversies. Later still, when I arrived at Oxford in January 2004, I wondered why God had called me there. Two weeks in, I was asked to preach at Inclusive Church on the eve of the presentation of *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* to the General Synod. Because I didn't have English manners, I felt free to be outspoken and used my position as Regius Professor to forward LGBT causes in whatever ways I could. Because Anglican Communion controversy was firing up over the ordination of Gene Robinson (a coupled gay man) as bishop of New Hampshire, I had a lot of work to do as a public theologian opposing the Anglican Covenant and educating the Church of England about the American church.

## YALE

Stimulating as urban ministry was, once I was ordained, I was increasingly dissatisfied with the “fit” of my philosophy department job. When George Lindbeck retired from Yale Divinity School (in 1993), I applied to become professor of historical theology. The move bristled with challenge and promise. The first challenge was that I was thoroughly out of sympathy with the Frei-Lindbeck Yale School, which understood theology as “grammar” or a set of linguistic rules about what to say, about which stories to tell. My jaw dropped to hear Lindbeck insist that the *Summa Theologica* was not about the metaphysics of Godhead, but about language. Yale schoolmen sometimes spoke of Christian religion as a language game sealed off from other language games (including philosophy) in such a way as not to have to interact with them. The approach was attractive to conservatives who wanted to hold content fixed without having to answer to challenges from historical and scientific disciplines. For a metaphysical realist and philosophical theologian like me, this was a non-starter. Lindbeck students regularly came up to me at conferences to say what a shame it was that I had succeeded him, because I could not and would not carry on the traditions of the Yale School.

Moreover, I had to play “catch up” when it came to the canon of twentieth-century theology. For this purpose, the annual theology seminar (for all and only theology faculty and Ph.D. students) was a help. The recipe was to take a theological locus (God, Trinity, Incarnation, soteriology, eschatology) and to read what five or six contemporary Germans (usually, Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Rahner, Tillich, von Balthasar) had to say. When I arrived, Barth

was very much in ascendancy, and I feared that I would have to master the whole *Church Dogmatics* to be part of the conversation. Certainly, I found Barth's lack of terminal facility trying (would that he had been disciplined in graduate school by the mandatory concision of four-page papers)! Just as irritating was Barth's animus against philosophical method in theology, when his own writings were steeped in philosophical allusions. The reconstructive programs of most of the others were underwritten by post-Kantian philosophical systems that I found philosophically uncongenial. For example, I could not get behind Hegelian-style moves of identifying God with the Absolute that is beyond the personal or impersonal, and denying that God as Ground of Being is an agent that does one thing rather than another.

Five years in, I concluded that the twentieth-century German canon was not going to bring me any closer to formulating my own constructive positions. Instead, I returned to Anglican authors. Moving forward from the Oxford Movement, I found in Gore-to-Temple the period that crystallized what attracted me so much: three-legged-stool Anglicanism that plays Scripture, Tradition, and Reason off one another in a balancing act; and a focus on the Incarnation and sacraments. The Bible, the ecumenical creeds and conciliar pronouncements, my favorite six medievals, and Gore-to-Temple Anglicans were and remain my chosen theological conversation partners.

Despite ideological misfits, I did come out of the closet as a theologian at Yale. Years before, I had told Orley that my two interests were the problem of evil and Christology. He challenged me to say how Jesus solves the problem of evil. It took a couple of decades, but eventually I wrote two books to do just that. Atheologian J. L. Mackie famously argues that theism is logically contradictory, because the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* is directed at Christian philosophers of religion and urges them to draw on the materials of revealed religion—e.g., the sufferings of Christ and/or sufferings within the Trinity—to show how horrendous evil is logically compatible with the existence of God. *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* is directed at theologians and explores who the Savior would have to be and what He would have to do, if His job were not primarily to solve the sin-problem but to save us from horrendous harms. The second book is a systematic Christology. Given my history of Jesus-centered religion, when I turned to systematic theology, where else could I begin?

Someone has said, "the glory of Yale is its students." Certainly, *the privilege of working with many and variously gifted Yale students was the height of my teaching career*. To begin with, Yale was a wonderful place to do historical theology. My medieval and Reformation survey was already built-in to Yale's four-semester patristics-to-twentieth-century sequence. I followed it with single-author graduate seminars on each of my favorite five, garnering enrollments from philosophy, religious studies, history, and medieval studies.

Along the way, I persuaded the most interested to learn Latin, so that we could proceed to reading courses on medieval theories of Trinity and Christology. I taught overloads and burned midnight oil, the better to seize my opportunity. Bringing to life the figures that one loves, analyzing theories that provoke, delving in and sharing the process of discovery, these are the scholar's delight, topped only by the satisfactions of watching one's students grow.

For most of my Yale years, Nicholas Wolterstorff held the Noah Porter Chair in Philosophical Theology. We joined forces to foster a program in philosophical theology, which challenged theologians with our dictum that philosophy is the backbone of theology, and sent them down the hill to the philosophy department for courses on Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel, while insisting that philosophers of religion should be at least as theologically and biblically literate as the average minister. Connections forged by the Society of Christian Philosophers brought many able students to masters' and doctoral programs at Yale. While they took our warnings with varying degrees of seriousness, the resultant cross-fertilization has enriched both fields.

Liberating for me was the way the divinity school context made it easy to integrate intellectual work into a life of worship. After all, didn't Anselm teach us, *theology is a kind of prayer*? Bob and I bought a house within walking distance of the daily liturgies of Berkeley Divinity School, the Episcopalian seminary at Yale. YDS also held mid-morning worship five days per week. When my turn came to preside at the Friday communion service, I worked with some extraordinarily feisty students to take the liturgy apart and re-assemble it into a Good-News startle. I also got involved in the preaching class, where it was so obvious that *preaching has to be done with your whole self!* I prayed and coffee-houred with Episcopal students on a daily basis. I am moved to watch so many of them taking up senior leadership positions in our Church. For me, being—in many and various ways—part of their formation was one of the great blessings of my life.

Nevertheless, my ten years at Yale-Berkeley Divinity School were institutionally apocalyptic. During that time (1993–2003), YDS and BDS each went through four different deans. Not only did we have three major LGBT blow-ups, there was a crisis in the Yale-Berkeley affiliation, when Yale mistakenly but publicly accused Berkeley's dean of financial wrongdoing. Caught in the whirl of bitter conflicts, lots of us tossed and turned through sleepless nights. Praying in the wee hours, it hit me: "These levels of anxiety are way out of proportion. What can they do to a tenured professor?" Then it came to me: my experience of Yale, of intense good and virulent evil existing side by side, structurally reproduced my childhood predicament. Current anxieties were drawing the stored terrors of youth up to consciousness, and these were amplifying the intensity of my adult experience. I reasoned: "No way could my childhood self have withstood these levels in her own strength—You must have been there all along!" Whew!

Several years later, institutional storms still raging, I had four hours of surgery for a broken wrist. An out-of-town friend visited that week and shared with me the latest round of sexist abuse that she had experienced from the Church. That night I woke up, still groggy from painkillers, and blurted out: “You could have got a lot more bang for your buck, if You had put my intelligence and determination into a male body! . . . and if You hadn’t left a big hole where the ego-strength was supposed to be!” I drifted off and woke up again. The voice said, “I wasn’t trying to get bang for my buck. I was trying to enable you to survive!” I drowsed and woke again: “and to give you something to enjoy!” A third time: “As for the ego-strength, I was planning to fill the gap with Myself.”

Stunned as I was, three messages lay on the surface. First, the experience cancelled the parental curse. Even if mother and father had partly hated me, *God* wanted me to exist, and that’s why I survived. Second, God-given intellectual ability was included in the survival kit, something to enjoy while I was struggling with the aftermath of childhood. Third, really present Godhead is with us always. God was there, among other things, absorbing some of the emotional energy of the conflicts, so that I was only smashed but not utterly destroyed by them. As Jim Loder predicted, some years were required for me to digest these meanings.

### “LIBERAL”

Politically, I am a pessimistic liberal, who is convinced that no merely human being is good enough or smart enough to be entrusted with very much power. Tolerance is a corollary. Liberals agree to differ about controversial matters of great importance (e.g., belief in God, the morality of war, abortion, or euthanasia), not because they hold no conscientious beliefs, but because it would be especially wrong in such weighty matters to try to force other people’s beliefs or to make them agree. Pessimistic liberals are too pessimistic to aim for purity in merely human institutions. All of them spawn systemic evils, which it becomes our duty to identify and uproot. Decision procedures exist, not to produce agreement, but to set institutional policy while the debate continues. There is nothing original in my position. It scarcely crossed my mind that it might be inconsistent with religious orthodoxy, until I moved from philosophy departments into theology.

When I arrived at Yale in 1993, I was surprised to find both left and right treating “liberal” and “Enlightenment” as dirty words. According to liberationists, Enlightenment doctrines of equality were a ruse: by remaking the whole human race in the image of the European white male, liberals had covertly cut others out of the conversation. Liberationists were carried along by a Marxian pragmatism that reduced thought to ideology and treated ideol-

ogy as a tool of power. Enlightenment searches for truth were written off as at best naïve and at worst deceptive. On the right, some conservatives about sex-and-gender issues explicitly dismissed mutual respect as an Enlightenment value. God was not and Christians should not be tolerant of error!

Months and years of listening to this rhetoric made me more determined than ever. “Liberal, and proud of it,” I came to say. The university is, after all, a liberal institution dedicated to seeking the truth, a medieval and enlightenment institution in which disagreement and vigorous criticism are tools of discovery. While my political objectives usually aligned with the left, I could not get on board with the *modus operandi* of either left or right. Among other things, I was and am an analytic philosopher by training and a metaphysical realist by conviction. At first, I was shocked and puzzled at the way theologians-of-engagement literature regularly distorted the texts of historical theology. Then, I realized, if thought is ideology and reality is socially constructed all the way down, why not use past thinkers to construct the enemy you need as a foil in forwarding your ideas? So-called strategic essentialism—which adopts essentialism (about race, sex, and gender) when it is politically useful to do so and switches to anti-essentialism when that appears politically advantageous—struck me as rank dishonesty and contempt for the truth. Deep-seated convictions are one thing. I have many myself. But the intolerance of both right and left struck me as a dangerous mixture of hubris and naïveté about human fallibility. The nastiness of resulting disputes was the metaphorical equivalent of drawing and quartering—the very thing that pessimistic liberalism was invented to prevent. If its “thin” values homogenize the human race, it is around the premise that each and every human being is worthy of respect and enjoys fundamental human rights. “Liberal,” I say, “and proud of it!”

When I went to Oxford in January 2004, my liberal sensibilities were shocked all over again by conservatives’ refusal to “agree to differ” on sex-and-gender issues within the Church of England and wider Anglican Communion debates. For Anglo-Catholics, women are not the right sort of thing to be ordained clergy. Even when made institutionally legitimate, ordinations would not “take” at the metaphysical level (the so-called “ontological change” would not happen), with the result that rites over which women presided could not be valid sacraments. The Anglo-Catholics declared that they could not tolerate remaining within the Church of England without the “protection” of a separate line of bishops whose sacramental faculties had not been compromised—to be precise, male bishops who had never laid hands on women as if to ordain.

In the wake of Gene Robinson’s consecration as bishop of New Hampshire, evangelical animus against ordaining and blessing partnered homosexuals became more intense than ever. Anglicans could not remain in worldwide communion if they did not agree on “essentials” in faith and practice. For



the past century and a half, this had meant adherence to Scripture and historic creeds (with variable nods to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion), episcopal polity, and worship somehow rooted in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Suddenly, essentials included “biblical morality”—most notably, the principles that sexual activity is to be restricted to the context of heterosexual marriage, and that homosexual activity is contrary to the will of God. At first, I was taken aback to see contentious ethical claims elevated to creedal status. Instancing the Church’s historic flip-flop on slavery, the American church carefully distinguishes faith in the Trinity and confession of the Incarnation from evolving human understanding of what the Good News means for human life together.

These heated disputes brought polity differences out of the closet. Liberals had remained part of an institution with whose institutional sex-and-gender policies (on women and LGBT) they conscientiously disagreed, because they hoped to work within the institution to change its policies when they came into their majority. Conservatives made it clear that they could conscientiously remain within an institution only so long as their own conscientious beliefs set institutional policies. Conservatives saw liberal willingness to “agree to differ” as unprincipled, while liberals viewed conservatives as sore losers. I myself became a vocal defender of a liberal church. What sense did it make for an established Church of England, by law committed to be open to all comers, to be anything else? Surely, unholy coercion would be the result of attempts to make legally independent national churches as culturally disparate as the American Church and the Anglican Church in Nigeria agree about sexual mores!

Moving to England brought my liberal sensibilities up short another way. I had always assumed that we Americans had borrowed our democratic institutions from England. I brought along a fierce commitment to representative government, public debate, transparent majority-rule decision making. I never got over my culture shock at finding how little these values were shared in the circles in which I moved. Oligarchy was the default instinct in Oxford colleges and in the Church of England. The Senior Common Room and the House of Bishops were more like elite clubs, where people know each other and come to understandings over sherry and cigars and wouldn’t think of rocking the boat enough to scandalize valued members. One head of house matter-of-factly admitted that he made all of the decisions because he knew what his colleagues wanted. Another explained how it would be shameful to have to take votes (because the defeated side would lose face?). Despite the fact that the General Synod of the Church of England is—by law—a legislature consisting of three houses, the House of Bishops still feels entitled to rule the Church of England. “Trust your betters to make your decisions for you!” When they kept proposing top-heavy polity models that further exalted the episcopacy, I was provoked to title my Bell lecture “The Episcopacy of All

Believers.” I agreed that episcopacy involves an “ontological change,” but I relocated it in that lived partnership with indwelling Godhead into which every Christian is initiated. Like infants growing up into a human way of being in the world, Christians need to be formed and informed by Scripture and tradition. What adult Christians are not free to do is to delegate their discernment to others. This means that our ecclesial institutions should be transparent and participatory, encouraging all believers to stretch up to their full stature in Christ.

## TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Cathedral worship was the glory of my time in Oxford. The thousand-year-old building was—among other things—steeped in prayer. In the Latin chapel especially, there was a palpable depth of silence. It was easy to be drawn into and enveloped by its cleansing force. Choral evensong was contemplative a different way. The daily round included three services: morning prayer, eucharist, evensong or “even-said.” They called me “Canon Omnipresent.” I knew I had roughly six years. There was no way I was going to miss my opportunity to be a monk! I got a key, so that I could come in early before others arrived in the morning. And so the Latin chapel became the scene where I poured out my questions and accusations and arguments, the place where I made my peace with God.

That God could call me out of such toxic conflicts at Yale into the wonder of Christ Church Cathedral raised my levels of trust considerably. Week by week, I surrendered more of the defenses I had put up against God and against myself. What a relief! In those early months, the college custodians (the security men in bowler hats) asked why I was always smiling. Practicing toward English reserve which I never achieved, I replied that the architecture cheered me up!

Nevertheless, time and candor predictably brought me back into the middle of my fundamental quarrel with God. Abandonment is one thing; betrayal, another. My head knew that it was theoretically impossible for an essentially omnipresent Creator and Sustainer to go AWOL, long before experience convinced me (at Yale) that God is always there. But even if God is always there, when we’ve tasted and seen horrendous evils, how can we regain that Lutheran confidence that God is always there *for us*?

The rock-bottom for me was hatred: horror participation turned me into a hater. I hated my parents. I hated other abusers in my life. I hated myself. And I hated God. Didn’t hatred at the core prove my parents’ point: I was too bad to be a Christian? I didn’t want to be a hater, but—despite years of spiritual direction and therapy—I was clueless how to stop.

For five and a half years, my early-morning plea was that God would take the hatred away. I begged to be transformed, so that I could love God with my whole self. “Speak the word only, and my soul shall be healed!” But however much I prayed and consciously willed it, the hatred didn’t go away. Petition turned to grief and anger: “You must hate me! Otherwise You would uproot the hatred and enable me to love You with all I’ve got.” Round and round I went in a vicious circle. Finally, my last holy week in Oxford, I came to “the hour of decision.” The only way out was to take a leap of faith, to choose to believe that whatever God’s reason for any of our torments, it’s not that God hates us. I took the leap. I quit praying for God to take the hatred away. Several months later in the midst of household chores, an imaginary conversation volunteered itself in my mind: “Do you hate God?” a nameless voice inquired. “Not anymore!” I replied without hesitation. It took me several more days to tumble to the realization: God had answered my prayer after all!

### CODA

In the summer of 2009, we returned to the States for tax reasons and took up research professorships at UNC-Chapel Hill. We are grateful for our time in England, and yet happy now to be within closer reach of many friends. Looking to the future, I have other books to write: a popular book on God and evil, a book on medieval views on the soul, my long-pondered monograph on Anselm, a book on ecclesiology arguing that the human side of the Church should be more like the liberal state, and a book on sacraments. In *Christ and Horrors*, I labor the question why God makes us in a world like this. I had no sooner sent it off than the issue flipped over in my mind to accentuate the positive: it is our vocation as material persons to work with God to make the material world holy, beginning with the material that we are. There is also a further spiritual exercise. At the age of sixty-five, I finally came to the point of trusting God enough to live. Now it is time to learn how to trust God enough to die!

Theology is something you do with your whole self, but it isn’t something you do by yourself. Theology is read “off the gut” through the lens of Scripture and tradition and in the context of community. Recognized or unrecognized, indwelling Godhead is teacher and partner. Theology is something you do with your whole self, but you can’t afford to wait to do it until your self is whole for this reason: many of us called to be theologians become whole by doing theology!