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# Welcome to The Torch

Once again, *The Torch* brings you a selection of good reading in its own right in the clear, engaging voices of Aquinas College student reviewers evaluating recent books on themes of interest to our community. This current issue of *The Torch* magazine represents a baker's dozen of reviewers, another increase from the total of last year's response. Even as enthusiasm for writing for the review magazine has grown, our student body has once again demonstrated that this generation of Catholic college students is one that engages the world with curiosity, intelligence, and enthusiasm for its task as leaders in today's society. They are scholars in the true sense, going beyond classroom assignments to analyze and review with care works that can speak to the needs and interests of America today. The genres of the books sampled herein range from the scholarly study to the intimate journal. The topics, too, represent a wide range of subjects including mathematics, Renaissance art, late antiquity, the modern Middle East, theology, literature, and impor-

tant historical and literary figures such as Saint Joan of Arc, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Flannery O'Connor. The opinions expressed in the reviews are those of the individual reviewers. In addition to thanking the student reviewers for their work, I want to express gratitude to the Aquinas College Director of Marketing and Communications, Mr. Paul Downey, who once again has produced the fine visual format that transforms these separate reviews into the polished, visually coherent magazine you are reading. As faculty advisor and editor, it has been my privilege to read the contents of this issue ahead of publication. I am therefore confident in my claim that surely there is at least one good book for you and your gift list in the selection below. Enjoy!

Katherine V. Haynes, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor, English  
School of Arts & Sciences  
The Torch Faculty Advisor and Editor

## *Prime Obsession: Bernard Riemann and the Greatest Unsolved Problem in Mathematics.* BY JOHN DERBYSHIRE

New York, NY: Penguin Books, Ltd. 2003. Print.

Review by SISTER SUSANNAH EDMUNDS, O.P.

If you have no interest in mathematics, you can stop here. Despair is the appropriate emotional response to this book for those who tuned out of math class when the teacher started using letters instead of numbers. *Prime Obsession: Bernard Riemann and the Greatest Unsolved Problem in Mathematics* by John Derbyshire (Penguin Books, 2003, \$17.00 RRP), is an exploration of one of the most convoluted theories in modern mathematics. But Derbyshire seems convinced there are enough readers who possess sufficient background knowledge and interest to warrant 364 pages of numerical and historical musings (not counting the plump notes section and index). A gamble, to be sure, but one which might just pay off.

*Prime Obsession* is not an exercise in applied mathematics. If you are seeking mathematical principles that can improve your finances or clarify your horoscope, you can stop here, too. After studying university-level mathematics, Derbyshire took up a career in systems analysis, so he is well aware of math's practical applications. Yet this book, his second foray into popular non-fiction, is almost entirely concerned with pure mathematics, in all its abstract glory. The Riemann hypothesis, the "great white whale" chased through its pages by generations of mathematicians, cannot be expressed in layman's language. The reader does not even begin to understand the hypothesis until page 296, after expeditions into the realms of complex analysis and number theory.

But there is reason for hope. Derbyshire is not only a mathematician: he is also a writer, and as his writing reveals, a teacher. His enthusiasm for the subject shines forth from each word, and from the ever-helpful, ever-fascinating diagrams that grace almost every page. Even this reviewer, an English major, was caught up in Derbyshire's wonder at the beauty of the prime numbers, to which Rie-

mann's Hypothesis is intricately linked. And when the hypothesis is revealed to have an eerie resemblance to recent discoveries in quantum mechanics, the reader cannot help but share Derbyshire awe: "What on earth does the distribution of prime numbers have to do with the behavior of subatomic particles?" (295).

*The Christian Science Monitor* was right to compare this book to a mystery novel: the reader is swept up in the quest for the "precious pearl" of twentieth-century mathematical research. The book follows two parallel paths: a systematic explanation of the mathematics behind Riemann's Hypothesis, and a chronological discussion of relevant mathematical history. Derbyshire alternates between mathematical and historical chapters, and maintains that the book can be read successfully even if one chooses to follow only one of these paths. This may be true. With delightful anecdotes and touching details, the author truly brings mathematicians like Euler,

Gauss and Riemann to life. But refusing to at least peruse the mathematical explanations would be a shame. The reader gains a priceless insight into these mathematicians' minds by delving into the very problems which they gave their lives to solve.



John Derbyshire

Who, then, is the target audience of this book? I certainly would use sections with high school math classes. Derbyshire has a knack of explaining extremely abstract concepts with clarity and even excitement. As for the wider public, Derbyshire states that he has "aimed this book at the intelligent and curious but nonmathematical reader." He goes on to clarify that "nonmathematical" presumes a level of understanding equivalent

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to high school algebra and calculus. He is certain that his explanation is as elementary as is possible, claiming that, “If you don’t understand the Hypothesis after finishing my book, you can be pretty sure you will never understand it” (xiii). This may not upset the

goals and ambitions of the average reader! But having tasted the beauty of the Hypothesis, I think that most readers who start this book will probably persevere to the end. It stretches both brain and heart, and opens up wide horizons. A worthy obsession, indeed.

## *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD.*

BY PETER BROWN

Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 2012. Print.

Review by NATHANIEL ANDERSON

“Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Oxford RSV, Matt. 19:24). This is how author and historian of Roman antiquity Peter Brown begins his work, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD*. This lengthy title gives the reader a quick glimpse into the content of the book, mainly, that of wealth and how it is perceived of as not only a means of commerce, but of status and wellbeing. Brown also goes into detail of how these ideas of wealth were slowly changed as the Roman Empire fall and Christianity spread. In addition to this book Brown has published other books that deal with ancient Roman history and the rise of Christianity, one of his more famous titles being *Augustine of Hippo*. Along with two other books dealing closely with the topic of this book and his biography on Augustine, it is apt to say that this new work falls within his much broader understanding of this specific time in history and thus should serve as a valuable resource to anyone interested in this period of history.



Peter Brown

Brown enters into this ancient history with a brief preface for why he has chosen to focus on the short glimpse of time from 350 to 550. He also lays forth how he intends to limit his geographical scope to not just Rome but to the Latin world, specifically. Lastly he sets forth themes and gives some final comments before beginning the actual work itself.

The entirety of the main body of this work is broken into five parts that cover the diverse issues that are discussed in this dense book. These parts begin with an introduction of the current state of the Roman world to lay forth an image of how the average and noble Roman might have lived. Most importantly, however, he touches upon topics such as how gold was viewed compared to how contemporaries understand it now, wealth, and in particular, how wealth was viewed in Christian churches of the period. Therefore, he gives a broad look at the topic of wealth and money.

Only after the reader thoroughly understands the importance of wealth does Brown proceed to the second part in which he introduces the major people who helped shape new ideas of wealth in a fading Empire and a growing Christian world. Brown thus starts with a pagan nobleman of late Rome, Symmachus, whom he follows with clerical men who came from wealth and had much to say

in regard to a Christian view of wealth, Ambrose and Augustine, and ends with Paulinus of Nola, a noble and a convert who renounces his wealth.

The third part of roughly one hundred pages, goes into detail on how wealth was now being grasped in the mind of people and some of the struggles faced by bishops and a fleeting Roman world. A great deal of this section is devoted to Augustine, his works, and ministry. Brown draws upon his incredible knowledge of Augustine in this section to give a one last look at the Roman world before it is thrown into turmoil. The last two parts of the book which are the shortest, only taking about a hundred pages between the two, show the aftermath and finally the transition from a pagan idea of wealth into a Christian one.

If there is any part of the book that can be singled out for a brief analysis, it is the setting of the stage by Brown of Symmachus and Ambrose. This section crucial in that it helps to lay the ground work for the rest of the book.

It is fascinating to see how Brown begins with Symmachus, a Roman nobleman. Here Brown lays out in this section a short explanation about how a “great levy of grain was the heart of the *Annona civica*—the food supply provided for the citizens of Rome” (110). He points out how the “*Annona civica* was never given to the population of Rome as a whole” (111) but only to “registered citizens of Rome” (111) thus, “it had nothing to do with poor relief” (111). This particular point leads to some disputes. Brown uses this to show that for some Romans there was a sense of pride and entitlement to have received this *Annona*. Brown then goes on to demonstrate for a Roman noble it was fitting to put on games and for nobles like Symmachus “they were the crowning demonstration of his potential— his ability to get things done. Only the truly great could give truly great games” (115). This would also help him as the Roman nobility began to open up to those who were not prior to the slump of the empire allowed into the nobility before and how they “would feel the weight of his [Symmachus’s] fortune” (116).

Brown then talks about familiar Christian figures such as Ambrose and Augustine. Both of these men radically upset the normal mindset of the Romans. Even Brown admits that there was an “adrenaline of civic love...that bishops such as Ambrose and Augustine preached urgently. As we shall see, they often did so in vain” (68). Brown goes further to point out that when these men preached they would be preaching to the rich to take care of the poor. This hurt the pride of many as:

They still wanted to be known as citizens of the miniature

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Rome of their hometown. Bolstered by this privilege, they refused to merge into the anonymous poor. They wished to stand out, if only a little, from the gray poverty of the destitute in the cities and from the huge, faceless world of the countryside around them. To receive food and entertainment not only made them comfortable; it made them feel different from everybody else. (69)

Sometimes to avoid this and give them something to be proud in, people like Ambrose “spoke of the poor as interchangeable with ‘the plebeians’ and ‘the people’” (133) so that not only the poor of the country but those of the citizens would be “part of the ‘people who rallied in a solid mass behind their bishop’” (133). This effort was undertaken so as to re-shift their fierce pride of city to a fierce pride of church.

If not at once obvious, this book presented by Brown is one that is extensive in its study yet narrow in its field of topic. This book is written just as much for the scholar as for those with only a taste for scholarly works of ancient history. It is then clearly seen to be one of great research; a hundred pages of the book are filled with primary and secondary citations as well as additional readings. Brown wants the reader to be as fully immersed in this topic, thus he endeavors, with copious amounts of research, for the reader to get a glimpse of the history he sets forth. Thus, this book becomes one dense with content and at times hard to read for the average or

casual reader. He is profuse in what he has to say and sometimes repeats himself unnecessarily. This sometimes can be frustrating. However, once one has read through this mountain of information, one begins to understand just how the Romans might have felt when people like Ambrose and Augustine came along.

For Brown, this book is to serve as a guide to just how radical this view about wealth was that came from Christians and how it later shaped a developing post-Roman world. His viewpoint in the book therefore is one of a secular. The reader feels when he is reading that Brown is at odds with the Christians and in fact would like nothing better than to write them off as a crazy sect. This feeling of estrangement from the Christian way of thinking is in fact the goal of Brown, who would want his readers to understand how radical the new religion of Christianity was shaping society through its concepts of wealth and economic justice.

This extraordinary work contains six hundred pages of text; the rest is devoted to works cited, as well as an index and lists of abbreviations illustrations and maps. Contained in the center of the book is a sample of images that give an idea of what villas and churches may have looked and been adorned. Overall, this is a fascinating introduction for the student to the relationship between material culture and the history of ideas and is definitely an important source to have for anyone interested in early Christian history.

## *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor.*

BY EAMON DUFFY

London: Yale UP, 2009. Print.

Review by ELIZABETH BECKER

Was ‘Bloody Mary’ actually bloody? Eamon Duffy, a professor of history at Cambridge and fellow at Magdalen College, and specialist in early modern Catholicism, answers this question in his book *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor*. He writes a thought-provoking analysis of Mary Tudor’s reign in England and the effectiveness of her efforts to restore Catholicism in her realm. Although Queen Mary and Cardinal Pole have been criticized for a seeming lack of enthusiasm for and knowledge of what was needed to accomplish their task, Duffy’s thesis claims that a closer examination of the information available reveals a strong Protestant bias among modern historians that is not grounded in fact.

For devout Catholics of the time, such as Queen Mary and Cardinal Pole, it was not so much the falling into error, but the obstinate persistence in heretical beliefs that constituted the loss of one’s soul. Thus, for Duffy, Mary and Cardinal Pole are not straight-laced, bigoted individuals with no sympathy for those who oppose them; rather, they *are* sympathetic, and primarily concerned with the eternal welfare of the souls entrusted to their care. Duffy shows that, within the historical context of sixteenth-century Europe, those who were involved in restoring the faith to England showed extraordinary patience, wisdom, and prudence in their efforts to convert heretics rather than execute them.

Queen Mary and Cardinal Pole were also concerned with the welfare of the realm in their care. In those days, part of maintaining unity and peace in the kingdom meant following the same religion—there was no such thing as separation of church and state:

“In the interests of political stability, it [Mary’s regime] was convinced that it had to break the back of protestant resistance” (Duffy 7). Following the same religion implies living the same life; thus,



Eamon Duffy

tolerating subjects not of the same religion as the ruler of the kingdom was to invite division and chaos. This was something Queen Mary could not afford after the schismatic division introduced by her father, King Henry VIII.

Under Cardinal Pole’s influence, the Marian regime especially emphasized the role of two martyrs killed because of their refusal to be complicit in Henry VIII’s rejection of papal authority in the matter of his divorce, Thomas More and John Fischer. Pole saw the blood of these two martyrs as “God’s special grace to England” (36), blood that “both accused and pleaded for the nation that had fallen away from Christ and his vicar” (36). Duffy, quoting Pole, says it was God’s special desire to preserve the Faith in England. For that end, “God ‘sent us books against your [the Protestants’] deceitful wisdom...we have these writings from the finger of God, the very holy martyrs of God...a certain book written not with ink but with blood’”(36). Cardinal Pole, with Queen Mary’s full approval, set out to bring England back under the yoke of obedience to papal authority. Though it would appear that during Elizabeth’s reign all

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headway was lost, for the queen and her supporters the generosity of such a gift was not to be wasted, and England did eventually find her way back to communion with the Church.

Duffy's work is organized in nine chapters of reasonable length of about ten to fifteen pages each. Thirty color illustration plates and a couple of maps are provided as visuals for the reader. Twenty pages of extensive endnotes, as well as a bibliography and index, are also included for further information. Main themes include: Mary and Cardinal Pole's true character and intentions, Pole's effective use of preaching as a means to draw Protestants back to the Church, explanations of the extensive measures taken to attempt the conversion of Protestants before an execution order, and the normalcy of execution as a deterrent to aberrant behaviors during that time period. The author writes in a scholarly, balanced manner, which is easily understandable to the advanced high school or average undergraduate student, as well as scholars in the field. Duffy's methodology, though, may pose difficulties at first for non-historians because of his frequent use of primary sources left in their original sixteenth-century English spelling and syntax.

Once the reader is acclimated to the change in language structure found in the primary documents, however, the benefit of so many original sources becomes clear. The first thing is that they

give Duffy historical credibility. Everything Duffy says is there, in the real words of the real people who lived the real events. The distance between modern-day America and sixteenth-century England is greatly shortened; there is a sense of immediacy, a sense of really being there. Primary sources also place Queen Mary and her decisions within their proper historical context, making them less likely to be exaggerated by modern sensibilities. So, after reading this book, did I want to be best friends with Queen Mary? Not particularly. But I did have a deepened appreciation for her as human person. I was able to see her as a ruler deeply concerned for the true welfare of her people, using the tools available to her and making the best decisions she could.

*Elizabeth Becker is currently a junior at Aquinas College majoring in Secondary English Education. Before coming to Aquinas, she earned an A.A.S. in Culinary Arts and an A.A.S. in Liberal Arts back home in Minnesota. She hopes to continue for a Master's in Theology or Catechetics so that she will be able to work teaching the Faith. When she is not doing homework, she is hanging out with friends, eating ice cream, or any other number of activities that involve friends and music.*

## God Ahead of Us: The Story of Divine Grace.

BY PAUL O'CALLAGHAN

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. Print.

Review by OLIVIA CASBARRO

If you're not quite a scholar yet not quite riding the wake of the generation of undereducated Catholics, Paul O'Callaghan has recently written a book for you. In his extended meditation, *God Ahead of Us: The Story of Divine Grace*, O'Callaghan explores the Catholic understanding of grace. While readers are expected to



Fr. Paul O'Callaghan

have a foundational understanding of theology, they are by no means expected to hold a Ph.D. O'Callaghan is a Roman Catholic priest and currently teaches Christian Anthropology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, Italy. In addition to teaching, O'Callaghan fulfills his role as Shepherd of the Church by devoting his time to producing books, in hopes of bringing the flocks Home. His most popular work, *Christ Our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology*,

published in 2011, explores the four last things: Death, judgment, heaven, and hell—things that can often be overlooked. He is well known for his publications worldwide and has a special interest in Catholic/Lutheran communication.

*God Ahead of Us: The Story of Divine Grace* is not a novel, but a theological dissertation on grace through the eyes of a Catholic. O'Callaghan approaches his subject in a highly systematic manner over eight chapters discusses (1) God's Plan of Grace and the Predestination of Humanity in Christ; (2) Christian Vocation and the Universal Call to Holiness; (3) The Justification of the Sinner and the Need for Grace; (4) The Christian, Child of God in the Spirit; (5) The Transformation of the Human Creature by Grace;

(6) The Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity; (7) Divine Grace and Free Human Response; and (8) The Fullness and Ultimate Meaning of Divine Grace: Glory and The Blessed Virgin. While the author doesn't do so, the book can be broken down into three sections: The discussion of what grace is (1-34), who needs grace and its application (35-64), and how we live out the life of grace (65-137).

Included in what I call section one is the Introduction. Here, O'Callaghan discusses the difficulties in understanding grace, which might be described as individualism, skepticism, and pseudo familiarity. In chapter one, grace is explained in regard to its necessity in gaining Heaven. He also, in chapter two, speaks as to why we need grace in order to live out our universal call to holiness.

Section two contains chapter three, The Justification of the Sinner and the Need for Grace, as well as chapter four, The Christian, Child of God in the Spirit. This section is the most controversial of the three. It is here that O'Callaghan can be most obviously identified as soundly Catholic. His teaching on the state of grace (35), the case for the baptism of children (37), and sanctification (38) would be troubling to a Protestant reader. The author goes on to speak to our role as children in the spirit. The basis O'Callaghan uses for this argument is the found in the New Testament, where he notes "God is called 'Father' more than 250 times." He goes on to say that "God's paternity in fact becomes a central element of the Christian Gospel" (48). O'Callaghan states his thesis clearly in this section; "Indeed scripture does not say that all humans are born children of God, but rather that they become adoptive children through bap-

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tism, by divine grace” (58).

Section three deals mainly with how we live out the life of grace. O’Callaghan begins by speaking about the transformation of the human creature by grace by explaining that a Christian is to become *ipse Christus*, another Christ. He also speaks to how we identify grace in our lives, how we are loved *by* and how we are lovers *of* Christ. Lastly, he speaks about the dialogue on grace between Lutherans and Catholics, a dialogue with which O’Callaghan has a special interest. Chapter six outlines the theological virtues. This chapter of 26 pages is the longest, establishing the theological virtues as

Substantially increase the natural human capacity of believing, hoping and loving and show that partaking in divine nature is true *life* and an [sic] real dynamism, an exercise of knowledge, desire and will that is oriented through God’s own power, towards God and the things of God. (78)

Chapter 7, Divine Grace and Free Human Response, specifically speaks to how we human beings are relevant to God’s will, which includes his distribution of grace. Furthermore, O’Callaghan goes on to answer questions on justification, merit and holiness. In the last chapter of *God Ahead of us: The Story of Divine Grace*, O’Callaghan discusses glory and the Blessed Virgin. This final chapter is more than a summary; it is a plea for clarity. O’Callaghan tries earnestly to communicate to his reader why the world was made, the reality of grace, and what divine omnipotence is. In addition to ensuring the reader’s clear understanding of what he feels is the most important takeaway from his work, O’Callaghan offers an ode to the Blessed Virgin Mary, calling her “the perfect model of Christian and human life” and “the perfect model of redeemed humanity” (133). The book ends with a loving paragraph stating Mary’s role in the Church. Following the content of the book, O’Callaghan provides a section titled “Further Reading” in which

one can find suggestions well suited to follow *God Ahead of Us: The Story of Divine Grace*, as well as a Bibliography and Index of Names.

This theological text for the common reader systematically approaches the Christian understanding of grace in an explicitly Catholic way. O’Callaghan does a marvelous job bringing a deep subject to the hands of laity. To tackle large questions like those pertaining to grace, O’Callaghan breaks down the answers in a digestible manner. This task is accomplished by simplifying arguments into analytical lists where the reader can digest information before moving on to the next statement. For example, O’Callaghan not only quotes St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* multiple times, but explains the citations in the vernacular. Furthermore, O’Callaghan laudably makes clear Catholic doctrine on not only grace, but baptism as well. The only negative thing to be said about this book is a sense of repetition; however, for the intended reader, the repetition may be helpful or even necessary.

*God Ahead of us, the Story of Divine Grace* can be purchased online for fewer than twenty dollars from Amazon, bought first hand in most Catholic bookstores, or obtained from a local library that carries works on theology. I recommend this book to anyone who has a basic understanding of theology and desires to deepen understanding of how God communicates with us. However, I would not recommend this book for a reader that is learned in theology, as it would be rudimentary.

*Olivia Casbarro is a student of Education for grades K-6 at Aquinas College and, upon completion of her Bachelor’s degree, anticipates earning a Master’s in Education. She looks forward to living a life in service to our future generations. Olivia is from Raleigh, North Carolina and spends her free time with the Lord in Adoration, riding her motorcycle, and wake boarding.*

## *Not as the World Gives: The Way of Creative Justice.*

BY STRATFORD CALDECOTT

Kettering: Angelico Press. 2014. Print.

Review by SISTER CHIARA CIRENZA, O.P.

On the cover of Stratford Caldecott’s *Not as the World Gives: The Way of Creative Justice*, is depicted an image of Christ washing the feet of His disciples, an act that can be summed up in one word: Service. This is precisely the theme of this wonderful work by an author who dedicated his life to the service of others through his writing and dedication to the Church and her people. Written not long before the author passed away, the book is perhaps the crown and jewel of his life’s work, a call and a challenge to all readers to take up a life of service such as the one laid out therein.

Writing primarily for Catholic readers, Caldecott begins his book by laying out “Catholic social doctrine, its history and the nature of human society in the Church” (Caldecott 5). He walks through the theology of the sacraments and how these relate to the Church’s teaching on the dignity of the human person and the Church as a reflection of heaven. Catholic Christians are called to view each and every member of society as made in the image and likeness of God, and life on earth as a preparation for eternal life. Thus, as members of the Church, each person has a duty to care for

his fellow men, and as members of the human family, each person has a right to the basic necessities of life.

From this explanation, Caldecott moves in the next few chapters to the challenges the Church and her teachings are facing in the present day. He dives into issues regarding technology, gender, reproduction, and the family. Presenting the issues in a peaceful and non-threatening way, Caldecott lays out the Catholic answer to the problems and issues arising from discussions surrounding these topics. He supports the views presented with quotes and ideas not only from Church fathers, theologians, and Popes, but also from ancient and modern day secular thinkers and philosophers. Among those referenced are John Paul II, D.C. Schindler, Thomas Aquinas, Henri de Lubac, Dante, Plato, and others. In this way, Caldecott shows that this way of justice which the Church has worked so hard to refine and perfect, is actually reasonable, and is not exclusive to Catholics, but can be understood and followed by people of all walks of life. The thought of the Church is certainly

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most well-understood by those who profess the fullness of faith, but it is also accessible to those who wish to understand it and approach with an open mind and heart, using logic and reasoning.

Realizing that the members of the Church have not been perfect throughout history, the author points out many of the downfalls that have taken place within the Church. He admits that she is led by imperfect and sinful humans and there have been times in history when her members have not acted in accord with the com-



Stratford Caldecott

mandments of love and mercy. However, the Church herself is holy and is ultimately led by the Savior, and thus even though her leaders and members are fallen, by the grace of God she remains under His guidance and protection. Thus she still retains the fullness of truth and her doctrines and statutes exist to bring humanity into communion with the Triune God, ever seeking to do His will.

As far as books which present an ideology of transformation for society, this book is one of the best! Caldecott challenges all readers to step out of their comfort zones and truly consider justice as giving another his due, seeking the true good for all. He presents the Church's theology of freedom and allows the reader to explore and really come in contact with his own humanity and that of others. Pointing most particularly to the dignity of the person, Caldecott claims that each person has been created by the Father in His own image and likeness, and it is the duty of humanity to treat one another with respect and allow one another to live as true sons of the Father. He states: "A culture of life is not simply one in which abortion is banned and provision made for unwanted children and their mothers; nor is it a culture in which the elderly are supported and comforted through the last stages of life instead of being quietly killed. It is those things, surely; but it is also a culture in which all human beings are welcomed and treated with kindness and respect" (99). This kind of living leads to inexpressible joy and a freedom that

cannot be imagined. It allows all persons to experience the love of God through one another and to attain happiness and fulfillment. Thus Caldecott asks the reader to consider what he or she is doing to promote this culture of life, to reflect on how he or she is treating those whom he meets.

The book as a whole is well-written and easily accessible to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The faith and teachings of the Church are laid out in terms which are easy to understand while still grasping the totality and depth of theology therein. Caldecott's approach is one of transformation, not only of society but first and foremost of the individual, of oneself. Recognizing that change in society can only come about through a transformation of individual persons, Caldecott places great emphasis on the dignity of the human person and how pleasing and precious each individual is in the eyes of God, for each was formed in His image. In this way, the reader must first contemplate and understand his or her own dignity and worth before beginning to understand that of others. In the order of loves, this is primary, for love of oneself is placed above love of one's neighbor, and it is only in loving and accepting oneself as a child of God that one can reach out in love toward his or her neighbor. Caldecott understood this on a deep level, and was able to see the incredible consequences and the beauty of people whose lives followed this tenant, and this is the reason he is so adamant on individual transformation.

Stratford Caldecott's *Not as the World Gives: The way of Creative Justice* is one of the most accessible and well-written on the topic of transformation. Laying out a plan based on the theology and doctrine of the Catholic Church, the author focuses on personal transformation which he recognizes will extend and have a positive impact on others through a transformative way of living. Equipped with footnotes, an extensive bibliography, and essays by the author which add a personal touch to the work, the book is incredibly applicable to issues arising in today's society and provides resources for further reading and contemplation. Overall it is a book which ought to be read again and again, and passed on to others for the benefit of individuals and societies as a whole.

## *Saint Augustine.* BY T.J. VAN BAVEL

Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2007.

Review by COREY MAYNORD

St. Augustine is one of the most extraordinary characters to have been handed down to modernity through the Church. Augustine has influenced almost every aspect of the life of Christianity (Catholic and otherwise), and his *Confessiones* is one of the most sold books of all time. Augustine's commentaries and theological works have long been sought after and held up as an authority in the Church, and doctors and theologians have revered the great Father of the Church as one, if not the most, brilliant mind to ever grace the Church. Hence, attempting to summarize Augustine is quite the task. It requires no small amount of effort and organization that can tax even the most august minds. However, it would seem that the editors of the compendium *Augustine* have admirably dispatched their mission. Using a series of essays composed by top-tier Augustine scholars, the compendium analyzes each aspect of Augustinian theology and life.

Editor Tarsicius J. van Bavel OSA, the eminent late Director

of the Augustijn Historisch Instituut in Heverlee, Belgium and Professor of Theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, has masterfully arranged the tome into accessible and convenient sections: *His Life*, *His Writings*, *The Bible*, *Theology and Spirituality*. These larger categories are then broken into subsections that delve into specific aspects of Augustine's thought and life written by such theologians as: Archbishop Rowan Williams, John Rist, and former Prior General of the Order of St. Augustine Bishop Robert Prevost. Thus, van Bavel creates a concise portrait of each aspect of the man Christianity now calls Father by using the best tools and means available to him.

One article of particular brilliance which is included in van Bavel's compendium is that of Donato Ogliairi simply entitled "Life of Grace". Ogliairi taps into the mind of St. Augustine as he speaks upon the Doctor of Grace's many theological opinions on grace

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and the profound effect Augustine had on the thought of the entire Christian world. However, unlike most theologians writing upon the topic of Augustinian thought, Ogliari does not concentrate on a favored side of Augustine's conversation on grace, but rather, he attempts to examine the whole corpus of Augustine's work and do so most fairly. Ogliari also examines a very specific aspect of Augustine's doctrine of grace: "preceding Grace" (226). This particular kind of grace, says Ogliari, is the belief that it, "is thanks to God's intervention that man's whole existence can be lived under the rule of Grace and in accordance with the will of God" (226). Using a combination of Scripture and Augustine's writings, Ogliari continues to purvey the mind of Augustine, and eventually concludes with Augustine's defense of God's justice which Augustine says is the, "key for a good understanding of (Augustinian) theology" (232).

However, the *Augustine* is not just a compendium for intellectuals and Augustine researchers. The compendium has a great amount of insight that can be garnered by all individuals regardless of vocation. Indeed, the artist will find the tome most enlightening as it contains many examples of the finest art pieces to be found, such as: *Augustine's Triumph* (left) by Claudio Coello, *The four fathers of the Church*, (center) and *Augustine gives out his Rule* (right)

by Bernardino Pinturicchio:

Augustine is indeed a figure of history that is hard to categorize. He has been called the Father of Western Christianity, Doctor of Grace, Father of Monasticism, and many other eccentric titles. However, the reality is far less glamorous but much more encouraging. Augustine was, as van Bavel shows, a man filled with passion, sin, and grace. He was a man seeking friendship and help throughout his struggles, of which there were many. *Augustine* has produced a fine portrait of the great Bishop of Hippo that portrays, not a lofty bishop upon a golden throne, but a man longing to see the glories of God and striving for truth in all of its facets. Through a variety of mediums, van Bavel has captured the essence of St. Augustine as the man, and saint, who was ever searching to find his vocation and ever seeking to serve God. For it was Augustine who wrote the now-famous line in his *Confessiones* at the opening of the first book. "You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You".

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## Chaucer's Tale: 1386 and the Road to Canterbury.

BY PAUL STROHM

New York: Viking Penguin, 2014.

Review by MARY HORNE

Paul Strohm's book is titled *Chaucer's Tale: 1386 and the Road to Canterbury*, and one might assume that based on such a title, this book focuses exclusively on the poet Geoffrey Chaucer and his famous work. One would be wrong to assume this, however, because while Strohm does indeed dedicate a good portion of his book to discussing these two things, there is more to the book than just an examination of a famous poet and his most famous work of literature. Instead, in this book, Strohm discusses at length the environment of fourteenth-century England around Chaucer and argues for a connection between the historical, political, and social context of the poet's life and *The Canterbury Tales*. Apparently this is not Strohm's first book on Chaucer, and the amount of information he gives on the poet's life and work shows it. This book does not read so much like a normal biography in that it does not follow Chaucer's life in particularly intimate detail. Rather, for much of the book, Strohm examines and explains in a straight-forward way the places, people, and general atmosphere of what life was like for those living in Chaucer's day and social sphere, because these things can be definitively known (7).

As a result, Strohm talks a great deal about the churches, the streets, and general goings on that Chaucer would have seen and heard in his day to day life in this book. Strohm also gives descriptions of the expectations for those holding the same positions that Chaucer held. For example, Strohm dedicates chapter four to discussing Chaucer's time in Parliament, but, in keeping with his method throughout the book, Strohm does not just discuss Chaucer, but Parliament itself at the time, and the many things that occurred during that particular convention of 1386. This al-

lows the reader to form a strong mental image of the setting of Chaucer's life as well as the people around him, for Strohm also gives information on the various personages with whom Chaucer would have associated or been connected in some way. These people include John of Gaunt, who ended up marrying Chaucer's own sister-in-law, and even King Richard II himself, under whom Chaucer served in a variety of positions. Strohm has plenty to say about these people and their actions as well as the social and political worlds in which they lived and operated.

Another of these notable personalities with whom Chaucer associated is Nicholas Brembre. As Strohm relates, "Brembre was far and away the most powerful man, and least scrupulous profiteer, in the city of London" (112) during the same time of his association with Chaucer (111).



Paul Strohm

While an examination of the environment and people around Chaucer alone would be worth reading, Strohm also ties all of this in with Chaucer and his works of literature. While *The Canterbury Tales* are obviously the main object of interest for Strohm, he also makes mention of Chaucer's other poems, including *The Book of the Duchess* and *A Parliament of Fowls*, and gives the context and possible motivation for their being written. Strohm discusses other literature of the time as well, and its definite influence on Chaucer. Petrarch, Dante, and especially Boccaccio are all mentioned by Strohm as having influenced Chaucer's creations (220). All of the above factors pro-

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duced conditions that led to Chaucer writing *The Canterbury Tales* (12), wherein Strohm says Chaucer made his own audience to “give [him] something that [had] just gone missing from his actual life: an environment of avid interest in literature and its effects” (235).

For the most part, the book does not give an intimate portrayal of Chaucer’s personal life, but Strohm tells the reader this from the start (6-7, 11-13), and the reason for it apparently comes from the fact that in Chaucer’s case it simply is not possible to do this and stay totally in the realm of truth (6-9). Strohm says that by examining recorded history about Chaucer while also looking at his works, he, Strohm, will connect these “two Chaucers” (7, 11-12). At the same time, Strohm is careful to point out that too much speculation on an author’s life based on his works can be dangerous (9), and hints that one can overdo the reverse of this too—just because a incident depicted in a work of literature sounds similar to something that its author likely experienced does not automati-

cally mean that one inspired the other (9-10). The result of Strohm’s method is that throughout this book, he follows Chaucer from a distance, sometimes losing sight of him to discuss some happening over here, or a particular way in which this corner in London looked, how business was done here, and what happened to that perhaps less than honest businessman over there, but always eventually catching Chaucer in his sights again and showing how all these things may, or may not, have affected his works. In consequence, this book is very informative in other areas concerning the poet, and Strohm’s descriptions certainly have merit beyond just in terms of how they pertain to Chaucer or his literature. For those interested in the workings and dealings of fourteenth century business and politics, for example, this book would be useful. For those enthusiastic about fourteenth century England in general, it can be enthralling.

## *Blessed and Beautiful: Picturing the Saints.*

BY ROBERT KIELY

New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2010.

Review by SISTER MARY COLETTE GALE, O.P.

Picture perfect pedestal holiness tailored made to one’s personal preference and taste—What more could you ask for? To make genuine friendships with the saints means getting comfortable with real flesh and blood human beings who were on fire with the love of the Lord and by implication a sign of contradiction to any potential portrayal of a static false piety. Saints, wanting to be our close friends along the path to holiness would themselves be very quick to dismantle the pious effigies that one attempts to build for them. Robert Kiely’s *Blessed and Beautiful* attempts to do this. At the outset the intended approach may seem a little unconventional for a book that is overflowing with facsimiles of beautiful Renaissance artwork, but this is a positive feature. In taking this approach, the author is seeking to demonstrate how Renaissance art does not shy away from saintly humanity but rather in most cases seeks to amplify it. Grace builds on nature. Thus although the lives of many saints may be overflowing with outward signs of the workings of God’s grace in their soul, this should not serve to make their humanity obscure or obsolete. Tying in this approach to sanctity, the book’s introduction seeks to dismantle any possible consternation arising from placing beauty and sanctity synonymously. Kiely puts to rest any qualms by an intelligent and widely read exposé of the literary, cultural, and historical background of fifteenth- and sixteenth- century religious art in a book that may at first sight appear to belong to the genre of the typical coffee table picture book, albeit slightly smaller in size.

Organized with a saint or a group of saints per chapter and their various respective artistic depictions, the book chronologically explores hagiographical details that potentially inspired these images including the author’s own observations. The Virgin Mary, being the first in the line-up, is artistically portrayed among others in the Annunciation scene depicted by Alessio Baldovinetti. At the beginning of the chapter there is provided a close-up of this piece



Robert Kiely

of artwork spread over two full pages of the book. This facsimile brings out rich, soft hues of the painting that augment the graceful figures of a standing Mary and half-kneeling angel Gabriel. In a style typical to Kiely’s approach to each of the saints portrayed in the book he, opens the chapter with an attention-grabbing, conversational tone. Often it is directed to the eye-catching, close-up covering two open pages of the book of an artwork depicting the saint that opens each chapter. For example, the chapter on Mary begins its discussion by drawing the reader’s attention to Baldovinetti’s Mary. Here it is noted that it is unusual to depict her in a standing position. Mary is standing; the angel is almost kneeling. Typically Annunciation scenes portray Mary as humbly kneeling in wondering receptivity to the angel’s message. When this seemingly artistically-provoked discrepancy is pointed out by Kiely, the bemused reader almost wants to denounce the supposed anomaly. Reading on though the author’s train of thought is reassuring in his logic for these observations. This visual rendition of the Annunciation is in fact embracing another facet of Mary’s beautiful human nature, namely that she stands as God’s highpoint in creation. She is the Mother of God.

The author Robert Kiely is Professor Emeritus of English at Harvard University and has written other books, including *The Romantic Novel in England* (1972), *Beyond Egotism: The Fiction of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence* (1980), and *Reverse Tradition, Postmodern Fiction and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (1991). He is a scholar of modernist literature, an historian and a critic. Family ties to Italy and art shape the genesis of this book’s inspiration. Retelling his first encounter in 1956 with the Brancacci Chapel, Oltrarno, Florence and the paintings of Masaccio that decorate its walls Kiely recalls how he was blown away by its beauty. “But I did know that I was in the presence of something rare, a profoundly moving witness to life, all the more touching because it was then that dim, unrestored, almost hidden from sight,

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as though patiently waiting to be noticed” (x). He then goes on to admit humorously that he had only studied English literature and that, well, art critics and historians had been admiring these frescos for centuries. Interestingly Kiely admits in the acknowledgments that he felt in one sense his area of expertise did not qualify him to write a book on Italian art. I sense though because of this reason the book which is the fruit of decades of amateur art appreciation in the Italian Renaissance tradition does have the potential to reach an audience beyond that of the professional art critic. In a very readable, perceptive and appealing style the author uncovers the layers of connection between Italian religious Renaissance art and its cultural and literary heritage. Sadly Kiely’s own personal bias in some cases tends to dominate the discussion adversely what would have been a wonderful opportunity to make more accessible the fully alive, fully human characters that make the saints.

Unabashedly approaching the more physically explicit works of Italian Renaissance religious art, Kiely is frank in disclosing his personal impressions. Not something that you would choose to read to your twelve year old cousin at the breakfast table. The important point though that Kiely made, but inadequately handled due to more of a secular, rather than faith-based approach, is that these depictions of the saints demonstrate the integrity of a saintly mind and body. Saints are not afraid of their bodies because they are gifted with the understanding and experience that comes with a true, God-given freedom of spirit. Consequently, whether the art-

ist is depicting a scantily-clad, arrow-riven Sebastian or a habited Catherine experiencing ecstatic prayer, the body is not seen as a barrier to spiritual perfection, something to be hated and treated as base. Rather, any form of bodily pain resulting from either martyrdom or self-inflicted penance stemmed from a self-love that found its source in a genuine, deep love for God. The saints had great respect for their bodies that derived from sensing the true dignity and worth of their humanity being made in the image and likeness of God. Likewise, they also had a great respect for the dignity and worth of their fellow human beings. Along these lines a quotation from the book comes to mind: “Perhaps Catherine’s greatest legacy—and one more reason to send her head home to her body—is her fundamental refusal to separate intellect from passion, willpower from reverence, self-respect from love of God. . . In the conclusion of *The Dialogue*, the soul thanks God and addresses him as a “deep sea” and a “mirror:” “When I look into this mirror, holding it in the hand of love, it shows me myself, as your creation, in you, and you in me through the union you have brought about of the Godhead with our humanity” (*Dialogue*, 366)” (277).

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## Not God’s Type: An Atheist Academic Lays Down Her Arms. BY HOLLY ORDWAY

San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014. Print.

Review by CHRISTA NIPPER

Once upon a time, there was no storyteller. Things happened. The End.

Twenty years ago, Holly Ordway found herself within this tale. She saw how flat the story was, devoid of rising and falling action, lacking in heroes and villains; dissatisfied, she sought a better story collecting one word at a time.

In her autobiography, *Not God’s Type: An Atheist Academic Lays Down her Arms*, Ordway shares her conversion experience. The professor presents her history sequentially, but in a highly stylized fashion. As she admits, her account is not merely or perfectly factual, for she does not, “pretend to have photographic precision. I cannot depict exactly how things were because words can only do so much” (3). Instead, *Not God’s Type* resembles that curious Shakespearean play *Midsummer Night’s Dream* which contains a play within a play. Ordway extends the style of her composition beyond the factual albeit subjective nature of autobiographies: She writes a fiction from facts, framed within the larger, grander story of creation. The biography’s layout and chapter introductions contribute to its narrative nature.

The twenty-seven chapters of her book fall between seven interludes. By counting the periods of rest with a number which represents perfection, the classically-trained author suggests the totality of rest her Catholicism affords and God’s perfection in crafting her story. Ordway copies the divine author, providing readers resting points in her composition.

Between each interlude, three or four chapters describe Ordway’s slow progression to faith. The English professor who now directs the Master of Arts Apologetics program at Houston University betrays her passion for lore through each chapter’s preface.



Holly Ordway

Carefully selecting quotes from classic epics, novels, and poems, Ordway anchors each of her chapters’ stories in the stories of C.S. Lewis, Gerald Manley Hopkins, and J.R.R. Tolkien. These introductory passages do not hang like ornamental wreaths on the doors of Ordway’s chapters, they undergird and overlay them, like aged timber hammered down as floorboards and propped up as rafters.

For example, Chapter Six begins with a passage from Tolkien: “It was in fairy stories that I first divined the potency of words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine” (37). Thus prefaced, Ordway explains her decision to write her dissertation on fantasy and *The Lord of the Rings*; “I chose to do my dissertation on fantasy,” she acknowledges, “because I wanted to spend my time thinking about stories filled with marvels and strangeness, excitement and meaning, even if those stories had, as I thought, no bearing on reality” (38). The author confesses that she first encountered Christ in figures such as Aslan and Aragorn (38-

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9), that her hunger for meaning she found in fantasy led her to the table of reality. Out of the otherness of stories, Ordway developed a longing for a metaphysical otherness, a world beyond the visible realm. Because the professor knew that, “atheism, when consistently lived out, leads to self-deception or despair. Self-constituted meaning is only a stop-gap: it is only real in the sense that a stage set of Elsinore Castle is a real place,” she began to look for true meaning (12). The preface introduces the ability of fairy stories to show the meaning of reality, a theme pivotal to the author’s conversion.

By tying her stories so tightly to rich, classic compositions which allude to other stories and other ancient themes, Ordway gives her reader a hand-spun thread. If he pulls it, the tale will continue beyond Ordway’s story, taking him through a tapestry woven from many tales, the tapestry of literature itself.

Ordway continues to present a message that transcends her own story by reminding her readers that God is the author of the comedy of her life. “This is not,” she insists, “a story of what I was clever enough to do, but rather what I was weak enough to have done to me and for me. It is an account of God’s work, a tale of grace acting in and through human beings but always issuing from him and leading back to him” (4). Her’s is one play among many, written, cast, and directed by God, all in the great play of history.

If, in the words of Italo Calvino, a classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say, then *Not God’s Type*, deserves this moniker. Ordway stands on the shoulders of literary giants, adding the story she crafted from her history to the stories of Lewis, Tol-

kien, and others. Classics enjoy larger audiences because their many dimensions appeal to both those interested in each particular dimension and to those who admire complex compositions. Accordingly, many readers can enjoy this book.

Those who appreciate European folklore or the works of the more modern Inklings, the group of English writers who met between the world wars, will enjoy the deft allusions and plot integration. Poets and their admirers will benefit from the excellent collection of passages woven throughout this autobiography, while athletes will understand the competitive pressures the author struggled with as a fencer and learn from her hard-earned sportsmanship. Those interested in philosophy will find strains of analytic philosophy and idealism mixed in the young Ordway’s thought, and those who appreciate theology can examine Ordway’s progression from Anglicanism to Catholicism. Literary critics can appreciate the structure of the book and the quality of the prose Ordway composes.

Although the most common audience will be Catholics looking for encouragement along their journey to Rome, this book will amuse and instruct all adults. Anyone who loves a good story should read *Not God’s Type*.

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## *The Maid of Orleans: The Life and Mysticism of Joan of Arc.* BY SVEN STOLPE, TRANS. ERIC LEWENHAUPT

New York: Ignatius, 2014. Print.

Review by LAUREN A. SMITH

Sven Stolpe’s lauded literary work focusing on the life as well as the mysticism of Joan of Arc could be considered one of the more plausible and well-researched accounts of the harrowing tale of the Maid. Stolpe transports the reader to the contemporary France of Joan’s lifetime, graphically describing in detail the events that would lead up to her trial and subsequent death. The author also evaluates other historians’ research and accounts, leading the reader to arrive at his or her own conclusions, while Stolpe himself creates a credible characterization of Joan that doubles as a work of literature. Stolpe sees Joan as a mystic, whose mission is not so much to restore Charles Valois to the French throne, but to share her experiences in the Passion of Christ with her contemporaries and Catholics through the centuries.

The main character of the tale, Joan of Arc, also known as “The Maid” seems a bit naïve at first. To the reader, Joan seems quite immature when first introduced, and perhaps a bit delusional. Stolpe even cites the famed historian Cordier, who uses modern psychology to argue that Joan did not actually hear voices of the saints, guiding her on her path to victory, but suffered from hallucinations and delusions, brought to life by the political turmoil surrounding France at the time. However, Stolpe also presents the argument of Joseph Calmette, who argued that whether or not Joan suffered from hallucinations is moot; the fact that she herself believed it

was God and the saints directing her on her mission is what matters. Indeed, if Joan did suffer from any medical condition that may have caused the voices she heard to not be from a heavenly source, the reader is well aware how the story ends; Joan does play a vital role in various battle victories and aiding Charles VII to rightfully claim the throne of France.

There are other secondary characters who assist Joan along the way; Saints Michael the Archangel, Catherine of Alexandria, and Margaret of Antioch who all appear to Joan in visions and tell her of God’s plan; Robert de Baudricourt, captain of the royal garrison at Vaucouleurs who was the first stepping stone in gaining access to Charles Valois, Dauphin of France; and Charles VII, the Dauphin of France who would eventually be crowned king with Joan’s assistance. The saints make rare appearances throughout the book, but each one is their own paradox; each saint is both authoritative and humble. Robert de Baudricourt and Charles Valois possess traits common to the nobility of the fifteenth century: Arrogance and pride.

Stolpe begins by drawing the reader into the political turmoil of France that has displaced Charles VII and sent him into hiding. There was a question regarding his legitimacy that allowed the English King Henry VI to usurp the French throne during the

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Hundred Years' War. As can be expected during any dispute involving the monarchy, certain areas of France supported the Dauphin, Charles, or the English invader, Henry.

During this upheaval, Joan is a small town peasant girl living in her family's home in Domremy. Her day-to-day activities are what most would expect of a precocious child. A very devout Catholic, Joan spends her Sundays at the local church attending Mass. She has one very close friend and confidante, Hauviette, with whom Joan would eventually entrust with her secrets. Joan also spends a lot of time with her local parish priest, Henri Arnolin, who describes Joan's spiritual fervor as slightly unsettling. One day, Joan is visited by two beautiful women who the reader will later learn are St. Margaret of Antioch and St. Catherine of Alexandria. Joan is so moved by their ethereal beauty and their piety, that she consecrates herself to God. The message from the two saints is clear: Joan must travel to Vaucouleurs and persuade Captain Baudricourt that she is the long awaited Maid sent to save France and restore Charles, the Dauphin, to the throne.

Joan travels with her parish priest to Vaucouleurs to have her first meeting with Robert de Baudricourt. Suffice it to say, this initial meeting between the two does not end well. Joan is ridiculed and mocked, threatened with rape and physical harm, but the young woman holds her ground. She insists to Baudricourt that she is the long awaited Maid, sent by God to save France and restore the Dauphin to his birthright. It is in her second meeting a short time later that Joan convinces Baudricourt that she is who she says she is and the party travels to Chinon, where Joan is to meet with the Dauphin himself, Charles VII.

Charles Valois is perhaps even more skeptical than Baudricourt when Joan is presented to him and makes her claim that she has been sent by God. At some point during this meeting, Joan shows Charles a spiritual sign, one that convinces not only the Dauphin, but the entire court of roughly 300 people of Joan's legitimacy. While Stolpe does not go into detail what the sign might have been, he alludes that perhaps it was the image of a crown placed over Charles' head (Chapter 7). While this is only speculation, Stolpe assures the audience that this was a public display with many witnesses present.

Joan is given command of a small troop of men who would all make the march to Orleans, and prepare the siege to the city. These events, in particular, will become of great interest during Joan's trial. Many of the men who accompanied the girl were questioned about her virtue and if it truly remained in tact. Each man

responded with the same answer, stating simply that they saw she was a holy woman who was carrying out a mission from the King of Heaven, and therefore never had any impure thoughts nor found themselves questioning her virginity.

The siege at Orleans is successful, and the legend of the Maid begins to circulate all through the country. Joan has, with the help of physical and spiritual beings alike, completed her mission to restore Charles VII to the throne. Charles is crowned at Reims, and shortly thereafter Joan fails in her military campaign in Paris. It is here that Joan is taken prisoner and formally accused of witchcraft. She is tortured at the prison in Rouan in an attempt to force her to recant her mission and admit that it was not bestowed on her from the Heavenly Father, but Joan staunchly defends the voices of the saints who led her to victory and subsequently up to this very moment. She continues to maintain that she is the Maid, sent by the King of Heaven to restore the rightful heir to the French throne. Joan is sentenced to death, and it is only while she is burning at the stake, do those who thought her a witch finally realize how holy the young woman was, and that they have "burned a saint."

While this biographical and historical piece certainly maintains the reader's attention throughout the 275 pages, it should be noted that there are sections that can seem a bit perplexing. Stolpe has a tendency to alternate between the current events happening in Joan's life and her trials. While this certainly ties in Joan's life with relatable portions of the trial, it can be hard to follow at times. All in all, the piece would most certainly be enjoyable to one who wishes to learn more than just legend about Joan of Arc and how her sacrifice played a vital role in shaping the European continent during the mid-fifteenth century. Since her death, Joan has continued to influence and offer strength to Catholics around the globe, proving that God doesn't always want the biggest and the strongest to perform his Will; sometimes He searches for the most unlikely of characters to achieve the greatest victories.

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Sven Stolpe

## *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey Among the Christians of the Middle East.* BY WILLIAM DALRYMPLE

New York: Vintage, 2012. Reprint.

Review by SISTER DELIA GRACE HAIKALA, O.P.

*From the Holy Mountain* is William Dalrymple's travel journal from his June-December 1994 journey in the Middle East. Dalrymple is an experienced traveler and author of *In Xanadu*, *City of Djinn*s, and several more recent histories. A student of Byzantine art and history, Dalrymple embarks on a journey in the footsteps of the sixth-century Byzantine monk, St. John Moschos. John Moschos, he explains, travelled throughout Eastern Byzantium with his

student Sophronius the Sophist, collecting the spiritual wisdom of the monks and hermits of his day. Rather like John Cassian's *Conferences* centuries before, Moschos's *The Spiritual Meadow* is a collection of the stories and advice that Moschos heard during his journeys.

Dalrymple's own travels in the footsteps of Moschos are fasci-

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nating. Moschos, he explains, sought to gather Christian wisdom before Christianity was eliminated from the East; Dalrymple, at the end of his journal, mentions the dissolution of Christianity, writing “Moschos saw its beginnings. I have seen the beginning of its end” (454). Dalrymple’s journey is remarkable for the glimpse it offers into the life of Christians in the Middle East. Though his text is dated for the researcher of contemporary politics in the Middle East, it is not at all irrelevant. If anything, Dalrymple’s chronicles of his stay reveal the turmoil which the Middle East has sustained since the time of John Moschos. Especially to the young reader, it is enlightening to learn of the Middle East twenty years ago. Especially considering the horror of today’s violence and unrest in the East, the records contained in this text reveal even more brilliantly the resilience of this Christian people which endures and triumphs with the strength of Christ.

Dalrymple’s travel journey, about 450 pages long, is divided into six parts which tell of his journeys in different lands. Dalrymple begins his pilgrimage in Greece at the Monastery at Mount Athos where he is privileged to view the original manuscript of *The Spiritual Meadow*. At this point in the text—and again later throughout his journal—Dalrymple injects short historical explanations which orient the reader to the landscape and atmosphere of the East. In his section in Greece, for example, Dalrymple familiarizes the reader with the growth of Christianity and of Islam in the East fifteen hundred years ago:

Indeed, at a time when Christianity had barely taken root in Britain, when Angles and Saxons were still sacrificing to Thor and Woden on the banks of the Thames and in the west the last Christian Britons were fighting a rearguard action under a leader who may have been called Arthur, the Levant was the heartland of Christianity and the centre of Christian civilisation. The monasteries of Byzantium were fortresses whose libraries and scriptoria preserved classical learning, philosophy and medicine against the encroaching hordes of raiders and nomads. Moreover, for all the decay, the Levant was still the richest, most populous and most highly educated part of the Mediterranean world (16-17).

Dalrymple’s text is a gift in its revelation of the culture, strength, and beauty that this rich land still has to offer the world.

From Greece Dalrymple travels to Turkey where he witnesses the distress of Christians in Istanbul and the flight of Christians even from the Phanar, the “Vatican of the East.” Dalrymple explains the history of these persecuted Suriani Christians and of the Armenians who were brutally massacred in Turkey. Dalrymple’s interactions with the people of these lands are heart wrenching but a treasure to have recorded. One such meeting is that of Dalrymple and the only remaining Armenian in Diyarbakir. She is an elderly woman named Lucine has not been able to speak since her husband was killed years ago and who is cared for by two old Kurdish brothers. All such people that Dalrymple meets have memories of the days when there were a multitude of Christians in their lands.

After his time in Turkey, Dalrymple voyages to Syria where he learns of the history of the Nestorians there. He also meets the Metropolitan of the Syrian Orthodox Cathedral in Aleppo. At this point in history, Dalrymple finds a Syria which is peaceful compared to the other countries he visits; while they fear for their future, Christians are at this moment fairly safe in Syria. Dalrymple discovers in Syria, as he will again in his later travel, that in the past Muslims and Christians interacted more regularly and peacefully, even in places of worship. Dalrymple visits several Christian

shrines during his journey at which he discovers that Muslims also come to pray for blessings and especially for the gift of children. Dalrymple explains: “The practice emphasises an important truth about the close affinity of the two great religions easily forgotten as the Eastern Christians—the last surviving bridge between Islam and Western Christianity—emigrate in reaction to the increasing hostility of the Islamic establishment” (169).

Dalrymple’s subsequent journeys to Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt are similarly rich in the experiences he has there. In Lebanon Dalrymple discovers the complexity of the civil war and the relationship between Christians, Palestinians, and other Arab Muslims there. A historian named Kemal Salibi explains to Dalrymple about the situation in Lebanon at the time that “it is the Christian Arabs who keep the Arab world ‘Arab’ rather than ‘Muslim.’ It is the Christian Arabs who show that Arabs and Muslims are two different things, that not all Muslims are Arabs and not all Arabs are Muslims” (214). After Lebanon, it is in his stay in West Bank that Dalrymple visits a Greek Orthodox church where a solitary remaining nun welcomes him to venerate the grave of John Moschos. Dalrymple also spends time in Jerusalem and Nazareth. From there he visits Egypt. There he visits St. Anthony’s Monastery where he speaks with Fr. Dioscuros about monastic life. Father explains that “When you pray alone in your cell without distraction you feel as if you are in front of God, as if nothing is coming to you except God.” Dalrymple responds that “you don’t have to come to the middle of the desert to find an empty room free of distractions.” “What you say is true,” said Fr. Dioscuros with a smile. “You can pray anywhere. After all, God is everywhere, so you can find him everywhere...but in the desert, in the pure clean atmosphere, in the silence—there you can find *yourself*. And unless you begin to know yourself, how can you even begin to search for God?” In Egypt Dalrymple again experiences the richness of the Christian heritage and the depth of the suffering experienced by the Christian people.



William Dalrymple

Dalrymple’s writing is excellent; it is direct and enjoyable, and the reader finds himself engaged before long in Dalrymple’s journey. It should be noted that Dalrymple’s attitude can sometimes be skeptical and some of his comments or observations crass. The book is written, at least to some extent, in the style of a secular travel novel; this somewhat distanced approach to religious themes may, however, make the book more enticing to non-Christians who would find in it all the same an excellent study of beautiful peoples. Despite this sometimes detached approach to religious themes (which Dalrymple may adopt in part to gain more explanation from those he interviews), Dalrymple is in no way unsympathetic to the sufferings of Christians in the Middle East and his work is a great tribute to their courage and perseverance. In addition, his travels are certainly a pilgrimage for Dalrymple, and when he arrives at the tomb of John Moschos, “prompted by the example of the nun, despite having half dropped the habit, I began to pray there, and the prayers came with surprising ease. I prayed for the people who had helped me on the journey . . . And then I did what I suppose I had come to do: I sought the blessing of John Moschos for the rest of the trip” (287).

*From the Holy Mountain* is divided into the six sections des-

*Continued on Page 14*

igned for his various destinations, and within each part of the book, Dalrymple's interactions are recorded in sections a few pages long each, making the book easy to read in short sittings if needed. The edition has three inserts of several black and white images, and one insert of color images, of the people and places Dalrymple discusses in his writings. Dalrymple's work also includes bibliographic information referenced for each chapter and a helpful glossary at the end which includes many religious and political terms, although there are some, such as "PKK", for example, could be added as an additional reference. *From the Holy Mountain* has been printed by several publishers including Henry Holt and Company, Vintage Books, and Flamingo. It can be purchased from large book stores or from Amazon for about 14 dollars. Finally, it is important to note that Dalrymple's text should be read as the genre it was written to be: A travel record. It may not supply the fullness of

the history which a textbook might about various conflicts in the Middle East. Nevertheless, *From the Holy Mountain* offers much that a textbook might not: In it, readers encounter the people of the Middle East, hear their stories, experience their danger, and are gifted with the example of their wisdom, perseverance, and faith. The text is a treasure for the personal experiences it offers to the reader. In *From the Holy Mountain* William Dalrymple offers a worthy tribute to the Christians in the Middle East to whom we owe a debt of gratitude and support.

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## *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature.* BY O.J. PADEL

Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013. Print, rev. ed.

Review by SISTER MARY GEMMA STUMP, O.P.

In this work, O.J. Padel offers a relatively brief, but in-depth study on the Arthur of medieval Welsh literature. Part of the Writers of Wales series, this book is different in that it examines a literary figure rather than a specific author. It is a reprint of the book that first appeared in the year 2000, and the new addition contains an index and supplementary bibliography, though the actual text has not been altered. "Naturally further work has been done in the meantime, but it has not significantly affected the discussions given here" (vii). Padel has also previously written several books on Cornish studies and shows a great love for Welsh history and culture. His resume includes the title of former Reader in Cornish and Celtic at the University of Cambridge. Padel does not set out in this work to establish or deny claims of an historical person. Rather, "this is a book about Arthur as a literary figure in medieval Wales" (1). Although historical or quasi-historical accounts of battles are taken into consideration, the purpose is not to establish Arthur's actual presence there, but to give a picture of his character and a context for subsequent literature.

Padel's topic is primarily the Arthur of Welsh legend and the development of his character through the ages. Some of his men are also examined, especially Cai (Kei) and Bedwyr (Sir Bedevere) who are the most popular of his companions in the literature studied. The book is arranged chronologically. Padel goes back in history to the earliest references and allusions that exist on Arthur and works his way forward, examining those elements of the legend and of Arthur's character that evolve over time and those that remain more or less stable. A summary is given of each story or poem, as well as relevant quotes, while problems of interpretation are also discussed and comparisons given of the works in question. The pieces of literature themselves come from very different genres, ranging from the humorous and light-hearted prose of "How Culhwch won Olwen" to the elegiac and contemplative *englyn* poetry.

The character of Arthur in early literature, dating back to the

ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, is quite different from the Arthur of later romances. This early Arthur is usually depicted as a soldier or leader of men, who lives outside of regular society, and who inhabits a mythical "world of magic and monsters, rapid-fire adventures and the out-witting or overpowering of supernatural opponents" (24-5). Rather than a king, he resembles Robin Hood, or the Irish folk hero Fionn. Padel examines several different portrayals of Arthur, some of which might seem contradictory: Is he a great military leader, or is he capricious, headstrong, and somewhat slow-witted? A good analysis is provided of these different portraits, explaining how they each fill out the picture of Arthur without necessarily creating multiple personalities. The major shift in Arthur's character did not come until the twelfth century when Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* bestowed imperial status upon Arthur. After this innovation, romances in Welsh began to paint Arthur in a similar light, but even later works sometimes retain allusions to his more ignoble characteristics.

While there is no way of knowing how much literature from the medieval ages has been lost, it seems that no fully developed history of Arthur existed until it was created by Geoffrey. His tale of Arthur first became popular on the continent and transformed many of the Arthurian characters, such as Mordred, who was highly regarded in Wales rather than despised as the traitor of later romances. Geoffrey's work, which came to be known as "The Matter of Britain," began to filter back into Wales and it is difficult to distinguish how much influence it had on subsequent tales of Arthur. "However, as could be expected, the indigenous images of Arthur's world proved persistent in Wales, and it is arguable that the real change in poetic references to the Arthurian legend did not come until the fifteenth century" (76). Even with the earlier Welsh literature, authors often seem to have changed or developed the story to suit their own purposes, be it to demonstrate their own wit, or, as in the Welsh-Latin Lives of saints, to glorify or give authority to the real subject of the work by reference to the great Arthur.

A wide range of folklore traditions and little known facts are provided in this book for the reader's pleasure; for example, Ar-



Oliver James Padel



thur was often thought to be a giant, and even possessed an invisibility cloak. Several natural land formations around Wales are also named as pieces of Arthur's furniture. Some of the questions raised in the examination of the literature, however, resemble the question of "which came first: The chicken or the egg?" Did certain stories and allusions worked into the poetry already exist in local legend, or were the details made up by the author? Often, the conclusion Padel reaches is that it is impossible to know. Some of his wording can also be complicated, leaving the reader to wonder what he is actually asking or what point is being made.

The penultimate chapter offers a brief discussion of other significant figures in Arthurian literature. This seems somewhat repetitive since most of these characters are touched on throughout, but Padel here gives a fuller development of their literary history. Other significant changes in Arthurian legend are mentioned, as well as aspects of local Welsh folklore that remained more or less unchanged despite the growing romantic tradition. The concluding chapter asks the questions: "First, was there a fully developed Arthurian legend in Wales, or only a range of independent tales and local folklore? Second, in what sense was there an 'Arthur of the Welsh' in the Middle Ages?" (92) Although they are intriguing

questions, like so many others raised in this book, they are largely unanswerable and remain open to speculation. As with the question of whether or not an historical person named Arthur actually existed, the lack of historical records makes any definite statement on his literary existence impossible.

While fairly short, and full of interesting information, this book is not a particularly easy read. Padel uses a familiar tone of voice, but his writing is directed more to a native Welsh audience or to scholars in the field. Padel includes much of the Welsh language in his book, and character names are generally given in their original Welsh form. Although he provides English translations, the language barrier makes it an awkward read for non-Welsh speakers. Neither is the text particularly refined. Certain phrases are repeated until they become cliché, and the author also includes many parenthetical comments and asides which can prove distracting. Certain terms and concepts also tend to be mentioned in one place but not explained until later. While this may not matter for the literary scholar already familiar with these terms, it makes comprehension difficult for a less-read audience. Still, there is thorough research behind the writing, and many people interested in folklore, and particularly in Arthur, can find some real gems in this book.

## *A Prayer Journal.* BY FLANNERY O'CONNOR. WILLIAM SESSIONS, ED.

New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013. Print.

Review by SISTER MARY LEO NORDMARK, O.P.

After startling the 1950s public with her abrasive novels and short stories, Flannery O'Connor once again enters into current readership with the 2013 publication of her *Prayer Journal*. Written during her time at the prestigious Iowa's Writers' Workshop, the journal reveals many of the desires and fears of this budding novelist. The refrains running throughout the entries are her desire to be a good writer and her fear of suffering. Three years after the last entry, O'Connor was suddenly struck with an attack of lupus. This autoimmune disease necessitated a rapid slowdown. Exiled as a pseudo-hermit to the family farm with only her plain-spoken mother Regina and her prized peacocks, O'Connor suffered for nearly fifteen years before collapsing from the disease. Although she could have turned in anger against a God who seemed to have ignored her many and fervent prayers, O'Connor continued patiently on her path. For the rest of her life, she kept a rigorous writing schedule and extensive correspondence, becoming one of the leading American literary figures of the twentieth century. She also attended Mass daily and defended her faith in both public lectures and private letters. Reading her *Prayer Journal* in light of her looming sufferings, the simple and hopeful prayers it contains are not only a delight to read, but also a revelation into that interior life that fueled and sustained all of her later dogged perseverance.

Written during her early twenties, O'Connor's self-documented prayer life depicts in dramatic colors and bold strokes the hopes and fears of a budding Catholic artist. *A Prayer Journal* begins with her caveat for the journal—though not rejecting the traditional Catholic prayers of her childhood, O'Connor wants to grow in love for God by speaking to Him straight from the heart. Whether in public or private, O'Connor was never afraid to say exactly what

she meant, and her *Prayer Journal* is no exception. Even before the Divine Presence, she never loses her wit and candor, as when she writes, "Oh Lord, I am saying, at present I am a cheese, make me a mystic, immediately. But then God can do that—make mystics out of cheeses" (38). Her desire to be a good writer is a constant refrain for the hopeful young woman's thoughts. But she consistently places this desire before the Lord and allows him to transform it. Her prayer "to succeed in the world with what I want to do" thus becomes a prayer "to be the best artist it is possible for me to be, under God" (29). Her ambition is not lost by her learned humility, but it is tempered to seek first the will of God. This transformation reflects her deeper growth in holy ambition—that is, her desire to be a saint. Her simple longing to know and love God develops into one to "only always just think of Him" (39).

Intermixed with these prayers for success are O'Connor's nervous pleas to avoid suffering. She cries out "I am afraid of pain," and again, "I feel too mediocre now to suffer" (10). In following the example of the crucified and risen Christ, the Catholic Church has always upheld the redemptive value of suffering. But O'Connor fears her own weaknesses, both physical and intellectual, and doubts whether she could withstand trauma with an unshaken faith. After trying to expel from her thoughts the ideas of modern agnosticism, which she calls "intellectual quackery" (5), O'Connor states, "It is hard to want to suffer; I presume Grace is necessary for the want. I am a mediocre of the spirit but there is hope" (36). This struggle with the idea of suffering may seem to spiral downward to the last entry, when she writes, "My thoughts are so far from God. He might as well not have made me.... Today I have proved myself a

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glutton—for scotch oatmeal cookies and erotic thought. There is nothing left to say of me” (40). But the preceding entry reveals O’Connor’s apparent despair to really be in recognition of her own weakness and a flinging impulse towards her Creator. There, she writes of her soul, “Its demands are absurd. It’s a moth who would be king, a stupid slothful thing, a foolish thing, who wants God, who made the earth, to be its Lover. Immediately” (38-39). The journal ends on a sober note not because O’Connor has given up on prayer, but because she has reached a peace with God and with herself. She has an infinite appetite for God, which nothing, not even her own sins, can hinder.



Flannery O’Connor

O’Connor’s young journey from a groping ignorance to a peaceful trust in the will of God was discovered by W.A. Sessions, an acquaintance of O’Connor’s and a literature professor in her native Georgia. Seeking to preserve the dignity of this intimate dialogue with God while still making it available to readers, Sessions presents a very neat, simple, hardback book, with a black-and-white photo of a young Flannery O’Connor in the first pages. The cover is almost entirely white, and the pages are given plenty of white space, contributing to the meditative feel of the work. At the same time, Sessions provides a delightful facsimile of the original cheap Sterling notebook-turned-journal. The reader is thus provided with two versions of the text—O’Connor’s original cursive, scrawled in the margins and replete with scratched out sections and spelling mistakes, and Sessions’ typed and spell-checked version. Although she had never intended the work for readership, she diligently edited her writing, giving God the best of her thoughts and her abilities. By providing the facsimile, Sessions also shows that the

journal is in no way a perfect, complete work. O’Connor seems to have ripped out the first few pages and cut out sections of others, making the journal start off in mid-sentence and then break-off at times unexpectedly. Sessions’ brief introduction concisely captures an image of the writer at the time the journal was written, as well as a glimpse at who O’Connor became in later life. His editorial work on this personal recording opens the heart of O’Connor to her many readers—a heart seeking to trust her God in every situation, and to use her gifts for His glory.

With O’Connor’s private prayer journal available for public consumption, a certain ethical dimension is brought to question: Should such an intimate dialogue be divulged in all fairness? Perhaps the best arguments are from O’Connor’s own writings, which contain her constant prayer to be published and her acknowledgment that “writing is dead. . . . This has its purpose if by God’s grace it will wake another soul; but it does me no good” (36). While she wrote to express herself to God, she also had no attachment to the prayers once they were written. She even seems frustrated at their failure to express the inexpressible. But we ignorant and weak readers can still delight in and learn from her intimate conversations with God. Flannery O’Connor’s *A Prayer Journal* holds wisps of the mystery of the universe—the action of God’s gentle, violent mercy and His daughter’s loving, trusting response. Let us, then, approach the secrets of the heart with fear and trembling.

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