



On Believing

A Collection of Meditations
Curated by Art House Dallas



Contents

FOREWORD

PROLOGUE

- 4 Who Can We Trust? by Rowan Williams
- 12 The Apostles' Creed

CHAPTER 1 **BELIEF**

- 16 A Coal in the Hand by Madeline L'Engle
- 24 Consider the River by Osip Mandelstam
- 25 Faith by Dawn Waters Baker

CHAPTER 2 **RESURRECTION**

- 30 The Redemption of Our Bodies by N.T. Wright
- 34 Let's Remake the World with Words by Gregory Orr
- 35 Riven Tree by Bruce Herman

CHAPTER 3 **EMBODIMENT**

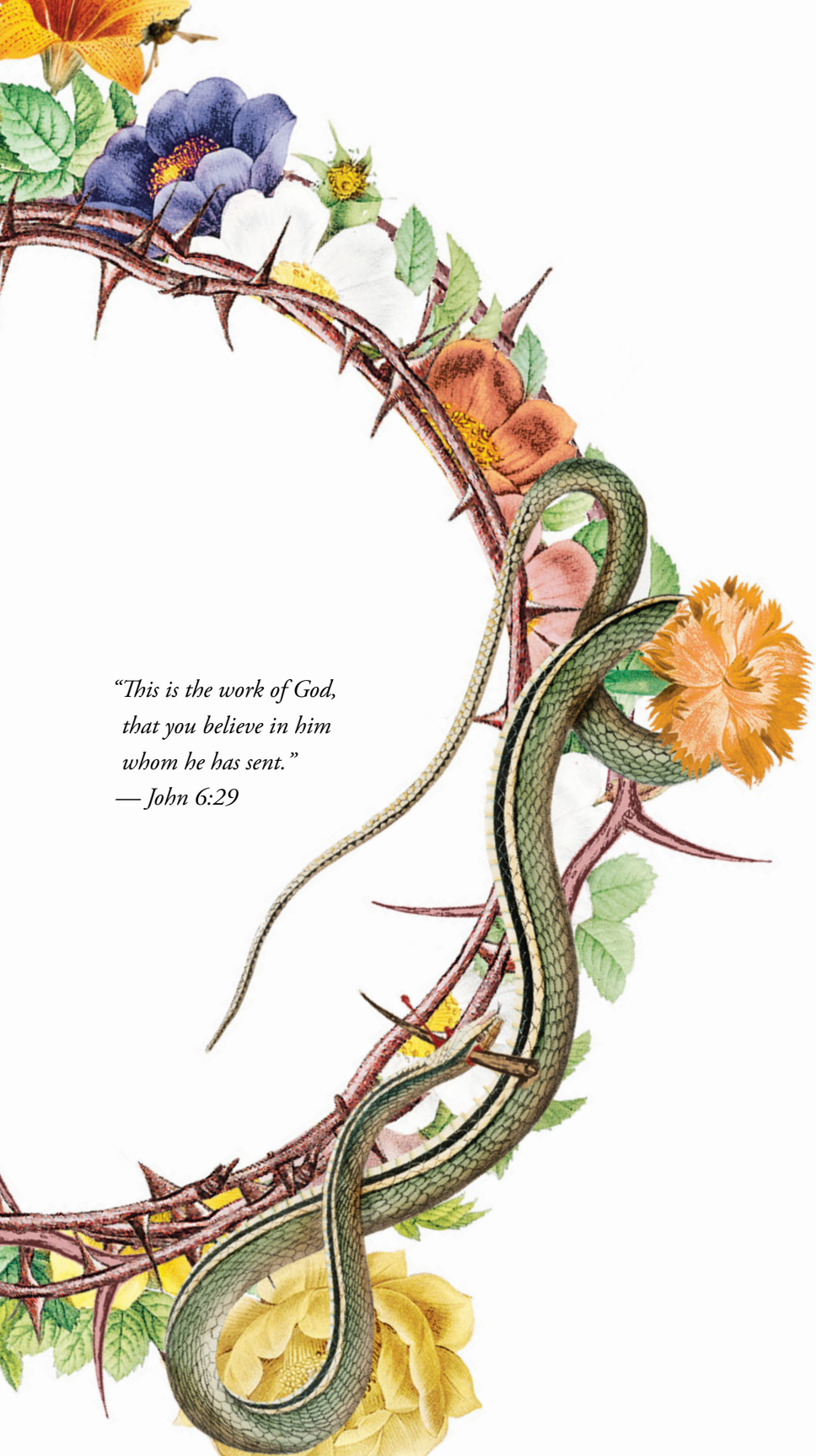
- 40 Discipleship by Eugene Peterson
- 46 Cellular by Glen Gauthier
- 47 Go to the Limits of Your Longing by Rainier Maria Rilke

CHAPTER 4 **BEAUTY**

- 52 Beauty, Mercy, and the New Creation by Makoto Fujimura
- 62 The Kingfisher by Mary Oliver
- 63 Matthew – Consider the Lilies by Makoto Fujimura

EPILOGUE

- 68 Things in Their Identity by Thomas Merton



*“This is the work of God,
that you believe in him
whom he has sent.”*
— John 6:29

Foreword

When one speaks of belief, much more than a thought or a feeling is being communicated. To believe in something or even to believe a particular thing about something or someone is to trust, to have confidence. And yes, believing or trusting in something does take time and perhaps should be a progressive knowing that begins as a seedling and grows into a mighty oak. However, it remains that belief is something of substance that forms one's world and way of being in the world.

It is here that you find yourself at a point of belief. It is less about being convinced and more about confidence—less polemic, more posture. The psalmist points our attention toward this in saying, “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.” The reader should not miss an emphasis on the way of leading to walking in the truth.

The pages ahead can be thought of as a path with signposts in the direction of God's truth, goodness, and beauty, pointing toward the ultimate Creator, as the Nicene Creed establishes, the “maker of heaven and earth, of all that is visible and invisible.”

Though belief is embodied confidence, it is not without doubt. In many ways, doubt is an essential ingredient to faith and a necessary part of the path of believing something to be true. The point here should not be mistaken. It is not to elevate doubt as some sort of virtue to be ascribed to but to ask, how can you genuinely believe what you have not doubted or considered on some level?

In this way of consideration, art often serves as a conduit to belief and faith. This is our hope for the pages ahead: that you might be drawn into a place of attentiveness and consideration revisiting what you believe and how it is that these beliefs shape who you are and how you are in this world.

—*Art House Dallas*

Prologue

*“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord,
and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee”*

*—Augustine of Hippo
Confessions*

Who Can We Trust?

by Rowan Williams

I believe in God the Father almighty.

A few years ago, the British philosopher, Onora O'Neill, argued in some broadcast lectures that our society was suffering from a crisis of trust. I suspect we may not need a professional philosopher to tell us the bare fact: pretty well everyone will recognize the sort of thing she means. But it helps to have an analysis of this condition. It isn't simply that we have become remarkably cynical in many of our attitudes, that we approach people in public life with unusual levels of suspicion. It's also, more disturbingly, that we don't feel the great institutions of our society are working for us. This means we are unhappy and mistrustful about our educational system, our health care services and police — let alone our representatives in government. But this is hardly something unique to us. Elsewhere we sense ourselves caught up in international economic and political patterns we can't control and which we don't believe work for our advantage. If we have noticed how things are beyond our national boundaries, we may feel that it's a system that simply doesn't work for human beings in general: rightly or wrongly, 'globalization' is often seen as a development that takes power away from actual local communities and individuals. And the stories that emerge from time to time about enormous frauds and endemic corruption in some big companies or banks do nothing at all to help. Belatedly, people are writing long books about the need for ordinary human trust and relation-building in business life, and it's very welcome. But the damage has been done, alas; we have learned to be suspicious.

There's no doubt that suspicion can be good for us in many circumstances. We need an edge of critical response in any democracy, and it is healthy that we don't passively take for granted what we're told. But in the UK, Baroness O'Neill and a good many others are suggesting that things have gone rather further than this, to the point where we just *assume* that things aren't arranged for our benefit. And when we feel powerless in the face of that, it isn't healthy. Mistrust is always connected with this sense of not being in

control, of someone else pulling the strings. And this a key to why it is such a problem. I feel mistrustful when I suspect that someone else's agenda and purpose has nothing to do either with my agenda or with what that someone else is claiming. They have a hidden advantage; I am being undermined. If I can't see quite how it all works but suspect that something hostile is going on all the same, the effect can be not only humiliating but paralyzing. Trust will feel like risk and folly.

There's quite a bit more to say about this, and we'll be coming back to the crises of our society later on; but I want to begin with the question of trust and its absence because the opening words of the Christian statement of faith, the creeds, are about just this. This doesn't always appear straight away, though. We say, 'I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth'. The form of words might initially remind us of questions like, 'Do you believe in ghosts?' or 'Do you believe in UFOs?' - questions about something 'out there' whose existence is doubtful, where the evidence is hotly disputed.

But, although there are unfortunately many, both believers and unbelievers, who treat the words like this, this wasn't at all what they originally meant. In John's Gospel (the ninth chapter), Jesus asks the blind man he's just cured whether he 'believes' in the Son of Man. He's certainly not asking (as he might ask about the Loch Ness monster) whether the man is of the opinion that the Son of Man exists; he wants to know whether the former blind man is ready to *trust* the Son of Man - that is, Jesus in his role as representative of the human race before God. The man - naturally - wants to know who the 'Son of Man' is, and Jesus says that it is him; the man responds with the words, 'I believe'.

He believes; he has confidence. That is, he doesn't go off wondering whether the Son of Man is out to further his own ends and deceive him. He trusts Jesus to be working for him, not for any selfish goals and he believes that what he sees and hears when Jesus is around is the truth. Hence the radical difference from 'believing' in UFOs or the Loch Ness monster. To believe in these doesn't make that much difference to how I feel about myself and the world in general, and it has nothing to do with whether the Loch Ness monster is reliable or not. If it existed, it would undoubtedly be useful to know if it was a creature of dependable and regular habits, but that isn't what we have in mind when we talk about believing in it.

The words at the beginning of the Creed, in contrast, do make a difference in how the world feels and you feel. They are closer to the formula used by Buddhists when they make a statement of faith: 'I take refuge in the Buddha' — the Buddha is where I belong, the Buddha is what I have

confidence in to keep me safe. And the Creed begins to sound a little different if we begin here.

‘I believe in God the Father almighty’ isn’t the first in a set of answers to the question, ‘How many ideas or pictures have I inside my head?’ as if God were the name of one more doubtful thing like UFOs and ghosts to add to the list of the furniture of my imagination. It is the beginning of a series of statements about where I find the anchorage of my life, where I find solid ground, home.

Now it may be worth adding a word about one detail before moving on. Some texts start ‘I believe: some start ‘We believe’; for example, the wording of some of the new services replaces the former with the latter at Holy Communion, and this has caused some controversy. But the fact is simply that the creeds originally had more than one purpose. The shorter text, the Apostles’ Creed, was probably used at baptism, the longer and more complicated text, the Nicene Creed, was worked out by councils of church leaders to try and rule out various faulty ideas. So it isn’t surprising that the Apostles’ Creed begins ‘I — it’s a formula for an individual taking a step of commitment in baptism, just like the Buddhist phrase I quoted above — and the Nicene Creed (in its early forms, though it was changed later) begins ‘We’ — it’s a statement of what has been agreed by a meeting and is to be said by the whole congregation together. It won’t really do to say that ‘we believe’ is a general formula that allows individuals more latitude in what they individually sign up to: it sets out what Christians can expect each other to take for granted. You might even say that it tells us why we can trust each other in the Christian community. We’re looking in the same direction, working with the same hopes and assumptions. So both ‘I’ and ‘we’ have their place, and not a great deal hangs on which of them we use at any moment.



But now to the hard question: *why* should we put our confidence in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth? Have we grounds for thinking him trustworthy? On the face of it, we might almost say that we had reasons for feeling rather unconfident. Surely God, above all, is one whose purposes we can’t fathom, whose ‘agenda’ is hidden from us, a completely alien intelligence, remote and transcendent? The sad truth is that a great deal of religion gives just that impression. God’s mysterious ways are appealed to when we can’t understand things (especially painful and shocking things), and we are encouraged to think about the vast gulf that separates us from God. But the Bible strongly suggests that this sort of religion is what we have to grow out of. Bad religion is about not trusting God, trying to avoid God

or even outwitting him; about approaching God as ‘the management’, or the head teacher, perhaps, a presence that is at best critical or hostile, always to be outmanoeuvred where possible.

The Bible gives us various answers to the question of why we should trust the maker of heaven and earth and not regard him as an unfathomable alien intelligence. One of the plainest answers is that found in the Letter of Ephesians in the New Testament, where the long and complex introductory passage (including one of the longest sentences in the Bible) culminates in the claim that, in the events around Jesus Christ, God has at last made his purpose clear; he has revealed the mystery hidden for ages past, he has shown us what his agenda is. What once was mysterious — or at least shadowy — has not emerged into daylight, and the purposes of God that existed from the world’s foundation are now laid bare for us. Because of Jesus we can now see that what God has always meant to happen is — to pick up two centrally important words in the Letter to the Ephesians — peace and praise. This and this alone is God’s ‘agenda’: the world he has made is designed to become a reconciled world, a world in which diverse human communities come to share a life together because they share the conviction that God has acted to set them free from fear and guilt. And this in turn is only one facet of a reconciliation that somehow affects the whole cosmos, that draws the diversity of the created world itself together so that it works harmoniously. This reconciliation liberates human voices for praise, for celebrating the glory of the God who has made it possible and has held steadily to his purpose from the beginning. This is what God is after, and there is no hidden agenda, nothing is kept back.

Not that this tells us all we could know of God, let alone all there is to know about God. It does not exhaust the sense of mystery or wonder at this ‘strange design’, as one of Charles Wesley’s hymns calls it. It simply assures us that we now know what God’s aim in creation is; and it is an aim directed entirely towards the benefit of ourselves and the rest of creation; it is in no way a ‘selfish’ purpose. God has no reason for deceiving us. If the purpose has been hidden, it is not because God has arbitrarily decided to keep us in the dark. The revelation has to wait until the time is ripe, until the perfect vehicle of communication has appeared. Up to that point, we are still obstinately wedded to various fantasies about God and about ourselves in relation to God. For the first generation of Christians, it was also true that there were spiritual forces around in the universe who had a vested interest in persuading us to think falsely about God — diabolical and deceptive powers who are out to enslave us by creating fear and suspicion towards the Creator. Now they have been shown up, and God himself has communicated his purpose by the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

So we don't get to know what God is 'like' in the abstract; we don't get a definition delivered in the language of ideas. We get a life that shows us what God wants to happen, one that makes it possible for what God wants actually to become real in and for all of us (just what this might mean is something we shall be coming back to later). We shall never get to know God as God knows God, and our human words will always fall immeasurably short of his reality; God cannot be for us an object at the mercy of our scrutiny, because God is always active, never just there over against us like objects in this world. The very activity of our thinking minds is what it is because God is activating them here and now. But precisely because we get to know God in what he does, not as an idea or an object, what we discover is his active will — what he wants, what his purpose, his longing is. And because of Jesus, we can understand that longing in terms of peace and praise.

Some of you may remember the great words towards the end of the medieval *Relations of the Divine Love* by the fourteenth-century hermit, Julian of Norwich. She is asked, does she want to know the Lord's 'meaning' in all these visions — does she want to know that his purpose is? And the answer is, 'Love was his meaning.' T.S. Eliot, who knew this text so well, wrote:

*Love is the unfamiliar name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
That human power cannot remove.*

At the heart of the desperate suffering there is in the world, suffering we can do nothing to resolve or remove for good, there is an indestructible energy making for love. If we have grasped what Jesus is about, we can trust that this is what lies at the foundation of everything.

You don't have to be a great theologian to notice that this leaves some immense questions unanswered. Some of these we shall have to spend more time on. But at this point, the significant thing is just to see the kind of answer that one of the writers in the Bible gives to the question, 'Why should we trust the maker of heaven and earth?'

• • •

However, there is another level at which the question can be answered, connected with what we have just been thinking about but going a bit deeper. In a nutshell, this is about saying that we can trust the maker

of heaven and earth precisely because he *is* the maker of heaven and earth. And this isn't simply an appeal to the idea that God must know what he's doing because he's in charge. It says something, yet again, about the character of God.

God is the unique source of everything.

Therefore, there is nothing God is forced to do. There is nothing alongside God, nothing by nature extra to God or beyond God. God is never one thing among others. So there can be no question of God having to do anything at all that he doesn't want to do. And because he cannot need anything, because he contains all reality eternally and by nature, the only thing that can 'motivate' his action is simply what he is, the kind of God he is. What he *does* shows us what he *is*.

Put slightly differently, this means that God can't have a selfish agenda, because he can't want anything for himself except to be the way he is. So if the world exists because of his action, the only motivation for this that we can even begin to think of is sheer unselfish love. He wants to give what he is to what isn't him; he wants difference to appear, he wants an Other to receive his joy and delight. He isn't bored and in need of company. He isn't frustrated and in need of help.

A word of caution here: some modern thinkers have been very tempted by language that seems to suggest that God is in some way in need of having something else around in order to become more fully himself. And this is tempting because it can sound very chilly if we say that God doesn't 'need' us; surely, when we love and are loved, it matters to know that we are needed. But I think we have to face a challenge here; we must get to grips with the idea that we don't 'contribute' anything to God, that God would have been the same God if we had never been created.

In terms of the inevitable give and take of human relationships, this would be a bit abnormal. But God, remember, isn't a reality on the level of anything else. In him is all he could need for his own happiness. And thus we have to bend our minds around the admittedly tough notion that we exist because of an utterly unconditional generosity. The love that God shows in making the world, like the love he shows towards the world once it is created, has no shadow or shred of self directed purpose in it; it is entirely and unreservedly given for our sake. It is not a concealed way for God to get something out of it for himself, because that would make nonsense of what we believe is God's eternal nature.

God is, in simple terms, sublimely and eternally happy to be God, and the fact that this sublime eternal happiness overflows into the act of creation is itself a way of telling us that God is to be trusted absolutely, that

God has no private agenda. It may be a bit shocking and hard to absorb, but that's what it seems we have to say. When — rather rarely — in our world we see someone acting without any thought for themselves, without reward or consolation, wholly focused on another, we see a faint reflection of what God is naturally like.

From one point of view, the difficulty is that we might quite like to think that we were loved because we were nice and helpful to God. But this is a bit like imagining that God forgives us because we're good (rather than making us good by forgiving us, as the Bible claims). The love God shows, in creating us as much as in saving us, is completely free. He doesn't owe us anything. He has chosen that we should exist and he has chosen to treat us always as lovable — as it has been forcefully expressed: 'he has thought that we were worth dying for'. So as soon as we begin to get the notion of creation into focus, we are faced with this demanding insight about unconditionally generous love; and we can perhaps see why there is no ground here for suspicion, no need to step back and say, 'Wait a minute: what's in this for you?' When we think about the Creator, we ought to have our natural suspiciousness checked at the very root; here at least we have reason for confidence.

As we shall see repeatedly, this belief in God the Creator doesn't unfold by a tidy process of argument. There really is a chicken and egg aspect to it. Human beings encounter God as the one who forgives them without condition and so they start reflecting on the freedom and power of his love. They see the existence of the whole universe in that perspective and come to develop the conviction that 'Love was his meaning' in everything. Or again, human beings are struck silent by the immensity and complexity of the universe, and they dimly start thinking about what concentration of unlimited energy would have to be imagined holding it all in being; and so they understand more fully why God doesn't treat us according to our deserving, following rules and conditions in his love towards us. What we say about God as maker of everything and what we say about God who meets us personally in forgiveness and renewal ought to be as closely allied as possible; it is one of the failings of some kinds of teaching, I think, that creation and salvation are treated as completely different topics, whereas the Bible seems again and again to hold them inseparably together.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
He descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

A Collect for Guidance

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1

Belief

“If we are to believe he is really alive with all that that implies, then we have to believe without proof. And of course that is the only way it could be. If it could be somehow proved, then we would have no choice but to believe. We would lose our freedom not to believe. And in the very moment that we lost that freedom, we would cease to be human beings. Our love of God would have been forced upon us, and love that is forced is of course not love at all. Love must be freely given. Love must live in the freedom not to love; it must take risks. Love must be prepared to suffer even as Jesus on the Cross suffered, and part of that suffering is doubt.”

—Frederick Buechner
The Magnificent Defeat

A Coal in the Hand

by Madeline L'Engle

I am grateful that I started writing at a very early age, before I realized what a daring thing it is to do, to set down words on paper, to attempt to tell a story, create characters. We have to be braver than we think we can be, because God is constantly calling us to be more than we are, to see through plastic sham to living, breathing reality, and to break down our defenses of self-protection in order to be free to receive and give love.

With God, even a rich man can enter the narrow gate to heaven. Earthbound as we are, even we can walk on water.

Paul certainly wasn't qualified to talk about love, Paul who had persecuted so many Christians as ruthlessly as possible; and yet his poem on love in 1 Corinthians has shattering power. It is not a vague, genial sense of well-being that it offers us but a particular, painful, birth-giving love. How to translate that one word which is the key word? *Charity* long ago lost its original meaning and has come to mean a cold, dutiful giving. And *love* is now almost entirely limited to the narrower forms of sex. Canon Tallis suggests that perhaps for our day the best translation of *love* is the name of Jesus, and that will tell us everything about love we need to know.

It is a listening, unselfconscious love, and many artists who are incapable of this in their daily living are able to find it as they listen to their work, that work which binds our wounds and heals us and helps us towards wholeness.

• • •

When I was a child my parents loved me not because I was good but because I was Madeleine, their child. I loved them, and I wanted to please them, but their love of me did not have to be earned.

Neither does the love of God. We are loved because we are his children, because we are. The more we feel that we ought to be loved because it is our due or because we deserve it, the less we will truly feel the need of God's love; the less implicit will be our trust; the less we will cry out, *Abba!*

Dostoyevsky writes, in *Crime and Punishment*,

“Then Christ will say to us, “Come as you well, Come drunkards, come weaklings, come forth ye children of shame...” And he will say to us, “Ye are swine, made in the Image of the Beast and with his mark, but come ye also.” And the wise men and those of understanding will say: “O Lord, why do you receive these men?” And he will say, “This is why I receive them, O ye of understanding, that not one of them believed himself to be worthy of this.” And he will hold out his hands to us and we shall fall down before him.. And we shall weep... and we shall understand all things! Then we shall understand all things! ... Lord, thy kingdom come.”

The root word of *humility* is *humus*, earth: to be *human*, too, comes from the same word; and the parables of Jesus which show the kind of humility he is seeking in us are often earthy, such as the parable of the workers in the vineyard, the parable of the seed and the sower, and the parable of the prodigal son. We all have within us that same lack of humility as the workers who worked in the heat of the day and resented those who got equal pay for shorter hours of work, and we all understand the lack of humility in the elder son who was offended by his father’s humble forgiveness.

King Lear’s humbleness at the end of his play is all the more moving because it has been born of the pain caused by his arrogance.

And another lovely paradox: we can be humble only when we know that we are God’s children, of infinite value, and eternally loved.

• • •

The disciples, like the rest of us, did not deserve God’s love, nor their Master’s. How must Jesus have felt when he was forced to realize that his disciples, whom he had called to be with him all the way, would not stand with him at the end? Without exception they fled the garden, even John and James and Peter, who had been with him the most. And of the men, only John was at the foot of the cross. The women were there, perhaps because throughout the ages women have been allowed to remain more in touch with the intuitive self than have men, who traditionally have been trained to limit themselves to the rational self. Men are to be strong; able and ready to fight, never to cry; to solve all problems with the rational intellect. While women, involved as they are in the nurture and upbringing of children far more than men, have

thereby been helped to retain the child and the dreamer in themselves.

And yet, despite the fear and unfaithfulness of his followers, Jesus' love never faltered, for it was not dependent on the merit and virtue and the qualifications of those he loved.

• • •

Wounds. By his wounds we are healed. But they are our wounds, too, and until we have been healed we do not know what wholeness is. The discipline of creation, be it to paint, compose, write, is an effort toward wholeness.

The great male artists have somehow or other retained this wholeness, this being in touch with both intellect and intuition, a wholeness which always has to be bought at a price in this world. How many artists, in the eyes of the world, have been less than whole? Toulouse-Lautrec had the body of a man and the legs of a child. Byron had a clubfoot. Demosthenes was a terrible stutterer. Traditionally, Homer was blind. The great artists have gained their wholeness through their wounds, their epilepsies, tuberculoses, periods of madness.

My son-in-law, Alan Jones, told me a story of Hasidic rabbi renowned for his piety. He was unexpectedly confronted one day by one of his devoted youthful disciples. In a burst of feeling, the young disciple exclaimed, "My master, I love you!" The ancient teacher looked up from his books and asked his fervent disciple, "Do you know what hurts me, my son?"

The young man was puzzled. Composing himself, he stuttered, "I don't understand your question, Rabbi. I am trying to tell you how much you mean to me, and you confused me with irrelevant questions."

"My question is neither confusing nor irrelevant," rejoined the rabbi. "For if you do not know what hurts me, how can you truly love me?"

• • •

No matter how much we are hurt, God knows about it, cares about it, and so, through his love, we are sometimes enabled to let go our hurts.

But it is not only our hurts which we are required to give over but our wholeness, too. It must all be his.

To trust, to be truly whole, is also to let go whatever we may consider our qualifications. There's a paradox here, and a trap for the lazy. I do not need to be "qualified" to play a Bach fugue on the piano (and playing a Bach fugue is for me an exercise in wholeness). But I cannot play that Bach fugue at all if I do not play the piano daily, if I do not practice my finger exercises.

There are equivalents of finger exercises in the writing of books, the painting of portraits, the composing of a song. We do not need to be qualified; the gift is free; and yet we have to pay for it.

Isaiah knew himself to be mortal and flawed, but he had the child's courage to say to the Lord, "Here I am. Send me." And he understood the freedom which the Spirit can give us from ordinary restrictions when he wrote, "When you pass through deep waters I am with you; when you pass through rivers, they will not sweep you away; walk through fire and you will not be scorched, through flames and they will not burn you." He may not have had this understanding before he wrote those words, for such understanding is a gift which comes when we let go and listen. I think I looked up this passage because I dreamed that a friend reached into the fireplace and drew out a living coal and held it in his hand, looking at its radiance, I wondered at him because he was not burned.

It may be that we have lost our ability to hold a blazing coal, to move unfettered through time, to walk on water, because we have been taught that such things have to be earned; we should deserve them; we must be qualified. We are suspicious of grace. We are afraid of the very lavishness of the gift. But a child rejoices in presents!

• • •

Finley Eversole, in *The Politics of Creativity*, writes,

"In our society, at the age of five, 90 percent of the population measures "high creativity." By the age of seven, the figure has dropped to 10 percent. And the percentage of adults with high creativity is only two percent! Our creativity is destroyed not through the use of outside force, but through criticism, innuendo..."

by the dirty devices of this world. So we are diminished, and we forget that we are more than we know. The child is aware of unlimited potential, and this munificence is one of the joys of creativity.

Those of us who struggle in our own ways, small or great, trickles or rivers, to create, are constantly having to unlearn what the world would teach us; it is not easy to keep a child's high creativity in these late years of the twentieth century.

• • •

It would be only too easy to blame all the dirty devices on the secular world. Some of them, alas, come from the churches, in the form of well-meaning distortions which once sprang from something creative, but which have been changed until they have become destructive.

Truth, for instance: we all want truth, that truth which Jesus promised would make us free. But where do we find it? How could it have happened that even in the church story has been lost as a vehicle of truth? Early in our corruption we are taught that fiction is not true. Too many people apologize when they are caught enjoying a book of fiction; they are afraid that it will be considered a waste of time and that they ought to be reading a biography or a book of information on how to pot plants. Is *Jane Eyre* not true? Did Conrad, turning to the writing of fiction in his sixties, not search there for truth? Was Melville, writing about the sea and the great conflict between a man and a whale, not delving for a deeper truth than we can find in any number of how-to books?

And Shakespeare and all the other dramatists before and after him! Are they not revealers of truth? Why then, in some evangelical colleges where I have lectured, are there “Speech Departments,” and the students produce and act in plays, but the department cannot be called “theatre,” because theatre is wicked and not true?

I have been married to an actor for thirty-four years, and I know him to be a man of total integrity who could not possibly live a life of untruth. I have witnessed his widening knowledge of truth as he has grappled with the characters he has depicted on the stage.

At two colleges during the past years, colleges widely separated geographically, earnest young women have asked me, “How does your husband reconcile being on television with being a Christian?”

My reply is an analogy, a story. I tell them of one time when our children were young and the play my husband was in was closing, and he would shortly be out of work.

He came home from the theatre one night with the script of a new play in which he had been offered a juicy role. He gave it to me to read, and when I had finished, I simply handed it back to him. He nodded. “I wouldn’t want the kids to see me in this. I’m not going to take it.”

We needed money for rent and food and clothes for our growing children. Hugh needed a job. But the criterion he used was: Would I want the kids to see me in this?

If he didn’t care about truth and integrity, what the kids saw him in wouldn’t matter.

Perhaps this is an insight into Christian art.

If we try to follow in Jesus' way, what the children see us in *does* matter. Jesus told his friends and disciples over and over again that not only were they to let the little children come to him but that they were to be like little children themselves. When we are like little children, with the openness the child has up until the age for school, then we retain our ability to be creators, our willingness to be open, to believe.

I need not belabour the point that to retain our childlike openness does not mean to be childish. Only the most mature of us are able to be childlike. And to be able to be childlike involves memory; we must never forget any part of ourselves. As of this writing I am sixty-one years old in chronology. But I am not an isolated, chronological numerical statistic. I am sixty-one, and I am also four, and twelve, and fifteen, and twenty-three, and thirty-one, and forty-five, and... and... and...

If we lose any part of ourselves, we are thereby diminished. If I cannot be thirteen and sixty-one simultaneously, part of me has been taken away.

Some of my friends and I have remarked that it would be marvelous if we could go back to college *now*; if we could go back to college and be eighteen again but keep everything we have learned in the intervening years, how much more we would get out of it! The marvelous thing is that in the writing of fiction we can, indeed, be eighteen again, and retain all that has happened to us in our slow growing up. For growing up never ends; we never get there. I am still in the process of growing up, but I will make no progress if I lose any of myself on the way.

We will not have the courage or the ability to unlearn the dirty devices of which Traherne warns us, or to keep our child's creativity, unless we are willing to be truly "grown-up." Creativity opens us to revelation, and when our high creativity is lower to 2 percent, so is our capacity to see angels, to walk on water, to talk with unicorns. In the act of creativity, the artist lets go the self-control which he normally clings to and is open to riding the wind. Something almost always happens to startle us during the act of creating, but not unless we let go our adult intellectual control and become as open as little children. This means not to set aside or discard the intellect but to understand that it is not to become a dictator, for when it does we are closed off from revelation.

Scientists sometimes understand this better than theologians. Dr. Friedrich Dessauer, an atomic physicist, writes,

"Man is a creature who depends entirely on revelation. In all his intellectual endeavor, he should always listen, always be

intent to hear and see. He should not strive to superimpose the structures of his own mind, his systems of thought upon reality. . . . At the beginning of all spiritual endeavor stands humility, and he who loses it can achieve no other heights than the heights of disillusionment.”

Creative scientists and saints expect revelation and do not fear it. Neither do children. But as we grow up and we are hurt, we learn not to trust, and that lack of trust is a wound as grievous as whatever caused it.

It strikes me that perhaps I am elevating scientists and down-grading theologians, and that is not true, nor fair. For the few scientists who live by revelation there are many more who are no more than technicians, who are terrified of the wide world outside the laboratory, and who trust nothing they cannot prove. Amazing things may happen in their test tubes and retorts, but only the rare few see the implications beyond the immediate experiment. They cannot trust further than their own senses, and this lack of trust is often caught by the rest of us.

I was told of a man who had a small son he loved dearly, and so he wanted to protect him against all the things in life which frighten and hurt. He was emphatic in telling the little boy that *nobody* can be trusted. One evening when the father came home, his son came running down the stairs to greet him, and the father stopped him at the landing. “Son,” he said, “Daddy has taught you that people are not to be trusted, hasn’t he?” “Yes, Daddy.” “You can’t trust anybody, can you?” “No, Daddy.” “But you can trust Daddy, can’t you?” “Oh yes, Daddy.” The father then held out his arms and said, “Jump,” and the little boy jumped with absolute trust that his father’s arms were waiting for him. But the father stepped aside and let the little boy fall crashing on the floor. “You see,” he said to his son, “you must trust *nobody*.”

I trusted my parents, thank God, and I think that my children trust me. We all fail each other; none of us is totally trustworthy; but the more we are trusted, the more we become worthy of trust.

There is much that the artist must trust. He must trust himself. He must trust his work. He must open himself to revelation, and that is an act of trust. The artist must never lose the trust of the child for the parent, not that of the father who knew only the “heights of disillusionment,” but the trustworthiness of most of us flawed and fallen parents who nevertheless try to do the best we can for our children.

Jesus told us to call the Lord and Creator of us all *Abba*. Not only Father or Sir or Lord, but *Abba*— Daddy—the small child’s name for Father. Not Dad, the way Daddy becomes Dad when the children reach adolescence,

but *Daddy*, the name of trust.

But how can we trust an Abba who has let the world come to all the grief of the past centuries? Who has given us the terrible gift of free will with which we seem to be determined to destroy ourselves?

We trust the one we call Abba as a child does, knowing that what seems unreasonable now will be seen to have reason later. We trust as Lady Julian of Norwich trusted, knowing that despite all the pain and horror of the world, ultimately God's loving purpose will be fulfilled and "all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well."

And this *all-wellness* underlies true art (Christian art) in all disciplines, an all-wellness that does not come to us because we are clever or virtuous but which is a gift of grace.

"A Coal in the Hand" from WALKING ON WATER: REFLECTIONS ON FAITH AND ART by Madeleine L'Engle, copyright © 1980, 1998, 2001 by Crosswicks, Ltd.. Used by permission of Convergent Books, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Consider the River

by Osip Mandelstam

Like a late gift long awaited, winter:
Personal, palpable stirrings.

I love the early animal of her,
These woozy, easy swings.

Soft atrocity, sweet fright,
As if for ravishment one first bowed and gave thanks...

And yet, before the forest's clean, hewn circle of light,
Even the raven banks.

Power more powerful for its precariousness,
Blue more blue for its ghost of white:

Consider the river, its constancy, its skin of almost ice,
Like a lullaby nullified by wakefulness...

"Consider the River" from Stolen Air: The Selected Poems of Osip Mandelstam; Selected and Translated by Christian Wiman. Copyright(c) 2012 by Christian Wiman. Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.



Faith by Dawn Waters Baker
Oil on canvas
40" x 40"
2018

John 1:9–13

“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

A Prayer of Response

God, today I resonate with the desperate cry in the Gospel, 'I believe, help my unbelief.' Sometimes I think I operate my life out of more doubt than faith. And yet I want to believe...and I do believe. I'm a complex creature. At times I can believe with my head, while my body is still locked into patterns of skepticism and doubt. Faith is not yet in my muscles, my bones, my glands. Increase faith within me, O Lord. I'm sure that for faith to grow you will put me in situations where I'll need resources beyond myself. I submit to this process. Will this mean moving out on behalf of others, praying for them and trusting you to work in them? If so, then show me the who, what, and where, and I will seek to act at your bidding. Throughout I am trusting you to take me from faith to faith—from the faith I do have to the faith that I am in the process of receiving. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.

—Richard Foster



Art House Dallas is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that works to cultivate creativity for the common good in order to inspire everyone to live more imaginative, meaningful lives. We accomplish our mission by fostering community amongst individuals, believing that their rich artistic expression will serve to bring a greater sense of belonging to our city. Our programming reaches individuals across many genres of the arts including music, writing, visual art, spiritual formation, and more.

Learn more and support our work at www.arthousedallas.com

Edited and printed in the United States of America by
Art House Dallas | www.arthousedallas.com
2122 Kidwell Street Ste. 205
Dallas, TX 75214

Cover Illustration: Collage compiled of public domain elements used
within the Creative Commons (CC0) licensing designation.

Cover Design & Reader Layout: Christopher Ryan Glenn

The authors, poets, and visual artists included in this anthology are the
sole copyright owner of the work, and retain all rights to the work. Art
House Dallas has used their work with expressed permission. All rights
reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or
used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission
of the cited authors.

All scripture references are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®
(ESV®) Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News
Publishers. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2016