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RLN exists to explore issues at the intersections of faith and life. In doing so we solicit and publish a range of opinions, not all of which reflect the official positions of the Diocese. We acknowledge that we meet and work in Treaty 1, 2, and 3 Land, the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota people and the homeland of the Metis Nation. We are grateful for their stewardship of this land and their hospitality which allows us to live, work, and serve God the Creator here.

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Amateur Reading

Image: The Travelling Companions, 1862, by Augustus Leopold Egg

“Part of what I’m doing in my letters is reclaiming a kind of reading, an approach to a text which is *amateur*, meaning full of love. You can actually fall in love with a text and give yourself to learn it through that love.”

- Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer

I have to credit Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer for introducing me to this new way of thinking about the word “amateur.” More often than not we think of the word amateur as an adjective for someone who is incompetent or demonstrates a lack of professional skill in a given area. But this word, perhaps, needs some rescuing. As it turns out, Gfroerer’s usage of “amateur” is truer to the word’s original meaning, which is derived from the Latin word “amator” meaning the *lover of or to love*.

In discussing her new book on the *Revelations of Divine Love*, a text written by 14th Century anchoress Julian of Norwich, Gfroerer refers to herself as an “amateur reader” of Julian’s text. And no, she is not admitting to her own lack of reading expertise; rather, she is using the word to illuminate her passionate pursuit of the text. Gfroerer is saying that she is a reader who loves and in turn pursues love through reading.

This kind of amateur reading approach is the inspiration for our June issue. That is to say, this month RLN is celebrating those of us who are lovers of the written word.

As a matter of fact, I found more of them in the diocese than could be contained in RLN’s usual 16-page spread! Which is why June’s issue has been expanded into a deluxe Summer Special featuring a whopping 18 pages. (How fitting that there should be extra reading in an issue called *The Reading Issue*!)

The Reading Issue begins with an absorbing account of an intimate poem, as Paul

Dyck invites us into his work with the Anglican 17th Century poet George Herbert. Then, we are so excited to feature a transcription of a conversation hosted by RLN, with guests Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer, Joanne Epp, Valerie Neufeld, and Christopher Trott. This conversation carries an incredible amount of depth, plunging into difficult albeit lively and beautiful territory as Gfroerer shepherds us through her new book *Anchorhold: Corresponding with Revelations of Divine Love*.

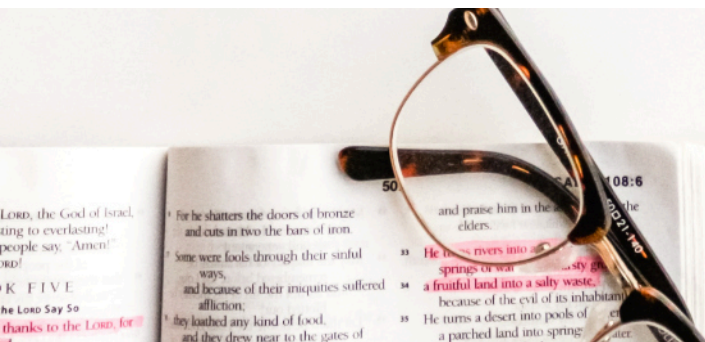
Later on, we are treated to the musings of Ryan Smith and Shelagh Balfour. In “Reading for No Reason at All,” Smith remembers what it means to read for pleasure and develops a special reading ritual with his daughter; Shelagh Balfour explores the question of what it means, and doesn’t mean, to “read like a Christian.” And finally, what is an issue on the subject of reading without a critical review or two? Theo Robinson reviews *A Kind of Solitude*, a powerful new book by Jamie Howison, and Jamie Howison, in turn, reviews a nifty little 43-page book called *What is the Anglican Church?*

This is the final monthly issue of RLN before we take a break for the summer. It has been an absolute delight working with and getting to know the writers, artists, and readers in the diocese, and I am looking forward to creatively and faithfully serving RLN readers again in September.

Have a splendid summer, Rupert’s Landers!



Sara Krahn is the editor of Rupert's Land News.



Learning the Word

GEOFFREY WOODCROFT

Photo: [Sincerely Media](#)

To the Church, sent and gathered in our diocese, Grace and Peace to you.

Disciples learn the Word from many sources, but most often beginning with some engagement with Holy Scripture, heard, read, and remembered. The Word that we are given has always been. It was in the beginning of creation with God and with Wisdom. That Word intends for us to become one with the story.

For several years my close friend has been telling me stories of his grandfather, a survivor of Indian Residential School, a caregiver to my friend, and a dedicated Christian disciple.

Recently my friend taught me this part of their grandfather's story. "When he left residential school my grandfather was hurt/wounded by the treatment and abuse he received at the hands of his caregivers. He was also very confused because the words of the Bible forced upon him at residential school church services in no way matched the behaviour of those who were responsible for his well-being. Sometime after his return home, grandfather went out on the land to heal, to think and to be. While he was there he thought a lot about Jesus in the Word that was read to him, and why those who read it to him did not look anything like the story of Jesus. When my grandfather returned from being out on the land he told his family that he was now a Christian." I have had a few days to digest this story and realize its implications for my story. My friend and I discussed that their grandfather understood that it was not Jesus and God of the Bible that harmed him, but people who did not like or respect him. My friend's grandfather's comprehension of the Word spoke powerfully to his experience and world view, even in the midst of profound cruelty.

Through the Judeo-Christian story some folk have tried to twist the shape of the Word to justify extremely poor human behavior toward others like slavery, expropriation/displacement, and genocide, as happened in the experience of many Indigenous people through Indian Residential Schools in Canada. God's foundational love and compassion is the Word; however, the Word cuts through human folly, greed and ignorance, and rescues both the oppressor and oppressed, reconciling the people of One God and one family from themselves. The Godly foundations of love and compassion do not twist or discriminate—they are always within human grasp, yet require us to reach past ourselves for them, whether we are the oppressed or oppressor.

The Word in biblical text must also be the same Word we experience in God's world, and the Word experienced through the teaching of disciples. This is a vital part of how the shape of our story becomes the shape of Jesus' story, as it did for my friend's grandfather. Our growing literacy concerning Jesus' story and the Word, as we encounter it in our lives, is imperative for developing new disciples.

Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word and the Word made Flesh, is on our lips, in our heads, upon our hearts, and in the vast experience we share.



Geoffrey Woodcroft,
Bishop of Rupert's Land

George Herbert, Poetry, and Incarnational Life

PAUL DYCK

Image: George Herbert at Bemerton, 1860, by William Dyce

I am writing a book about the poetry of George Herbert, the 17th century Anglican priest whose work is broadly recognized as one of the English church's greatest spiritual resources. Many readers will know his hymns, such as "King of glory, King of Peace," "Teach me my God and King," "The God of love my shepherd is," and "Let all the world in every corner sing." Not growing up in the Anglican church, I first encountered Herbert's poetry in first-year university, when my English professor had us read "Love" (3), which begins "Love bade me welcome," which Ralph Vaughan Williams has so wonderfully set in his *Five Mystical Songs*.

What my professor really wanted to talk about, though, was sex, and how what seemed to be a spiritual poem was actually filled with repressed erotic desire. I hadn't paid a lot of attention to the poem, but there on the spot I offered that it wasn't about sex, but about Communion. And there I was, unwittingly initiated into the world of literary criticism and the various competing interpreters of Herbert's best-known poem.

I knew at the time—for she told us all about it—that this senior professor had gone to a Catholic girls' school and had been taught by nuns, and for all the time and freedom since, she brought that child's rebellion to her classroom. She was still trying to get even. I think this was what actually got me hooked on English. There was nothing neutral in these texts: she was still wrestling with those nuns and now with pip-squeak me for her soul, and for mine.

But what exactly were we disagreeing about? Herbert, even as he has been cherished, has been shrouded in a hagiographical haze. A friend of mine sent me a quotation to this effect, that "if you're only going to read literature by people who have lived a perfect life, you should be prepared to spend a lot of time with George Herbert." For my professor, the fitting way to puncture Herbert's spirituality was to show how erotic it is. If it has to do with the desires of the body, then it obviously isn't spiritual. She could bring him down to earth.

As I've come to see since, though, Herbert is already very down-to-earth. Read the poem.

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,

Guilty of dust and sinne.

But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack

From my first entrance in,

Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,

If I lack'd any thing.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:

Love said, you shall be he.

I the unkinde, ungrateful? Ah my deare,

I cannot look on thee.

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,

Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame

Go where it doth deserve.

And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?

My deare, then I will serve.

You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:

So I did sit and eat.

Another professor told me a few years ago that one of his students had given a presentation on the poem, entirely assuming that it was a dialogue between two (human) lovers, and then had been deeply embarrassed to learn that it was actually about divine love. But isn't this exactly right? Why would we think that a poem being erotic—that is, involving the attraction of bodies, of flesh—would be contradictory to its spirituality? Maybe you find my question disingenuous: we've probably all been taught somewhere along the line not to trust our sexual desires and maybe even to think of sexual desire as wrong. Well yes, and the first part of that is pretty important. The point isn't that sexual desires ought to be trusted as a guiding light, and Herbert wouldn't have said they should be. But at the same time, when he comes to tell the story of us meeting Jesus, we can fully feel this encounter. He doesn't imagine

some sublime radiance of pure light as our souls meet in a cosmic dance. He imagines standing as a guest, hesitating at the door, and a Host who comes to meet him, taking him by the hand and looking him in the eye. There is no poem here without the lovely meeting of bodies, and the young student who sees lovers here is on the right track. The poem is about that, and more than that.

Herbert in his poetry does theological work of profoundest sort. We might take him as a model. He very often wrestles with his human desires and limitations (and he is far—we might note—from perfect). But he never finally treats his humanity or anyone else's as an obstacle to spirituality. "Love" (3) is a spiritual gem because it is so very human, so disarmingly and totally human. And the doctrine of the poem does not tear it away from our human experience, but gives that experience a blessing. In the center stanza, Love looks at the guest, but the guest cannot look back, and we've all been there. The guest feels ashamed. And shame is a bodily experience as well as an inner one: we feel it when someone is looking at us, or when we don't want to be seen. Love takes the guest's hand and says "Who made the eyes but I?" The Love going on here is lovely, and gently erotic, and it (because it is this) is also *agape*. I've thought of *agape* love as love without self-interest (and thus in contrast to the erotic), but Herbert shows that it is much more than that. This love is creative, and Herbert means it literally. This Love is not merely generous and forgiving, but is the very Maker of the guest.

The erotic does not undermine the poem because the poem is already fully erotic. But the poem does embarrass us. It brings us back to our bodies and our need for touch, and blesses us in just this way by pronouncing us created, loved.



Photo: Kenji Dyck

Paul Dyck is Professor of English at Canadian Mennonite University and a lay preacher and vestry member at St. Margaret, Winnipeg. He lives in Wolseley with his wife, writer Sally Ito.

In May, I had the immense pleasure of hosting a virtual roundtable discussion on Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer's new book, *Anchorhold: Corresponding with Revelations of Divine Love*. The discussion participants included myself, Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer, Chris Trott, Joanne Epp, and Val Neufeld. The following article is an edited transcription of our (much lengthier!) discussion.

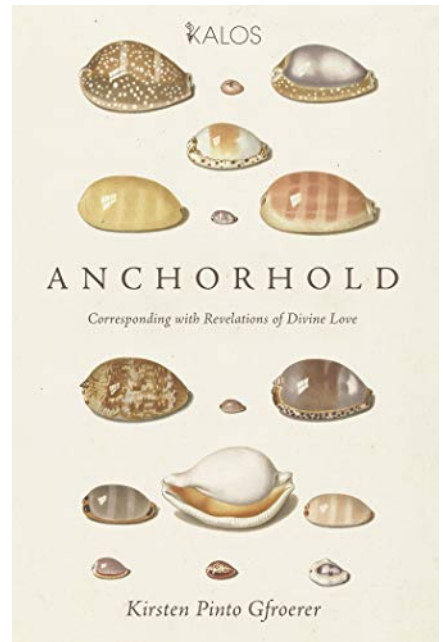
- Sara Krahn,
Editor of Rupert's Land News

RLN: I would like to start by extending a huge and heartfelt welcome to Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer for taking the time to chat with us about her beautiful new book, *Anchorhold: Corresponding with Revelations of Divine Love*. Kirsten, you are no stranger to all of us here and you are the reason we are all here, as your life and work have overlapped with the life of each participant here, be it through your preaching, writing, counselling, or friendship. Our panel of participants, however, might be less known to each other, so I would like each participant to say just a bit about themselves, their name, their vocation, and their relationship to Kirsten.

Chris: I am the Warden of St John's College in Winnipeg and an Associate Professor in the Native Studies Department teaching Inuit studies. I met Kirsten a number of years ago when we worked on some projects on theological education in the Diocese together. Julian of Norwich is one of my favourite Christian writers and I was very excited when I found out that Kirsten was writing on the Revelations. I am an unregenerate academic and I fear my questions look more like a doctoral examination than a conversation.

Val: I am 57—mother of two kids in their 20's. I work as a therapist and have done so for the past almost 30 years. I also come from a family of pilots and at 50 I also got my license and a few times every year my

RLN in Conversation with Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer



Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer is a counsellor and writer based in Winnipeg. She is part of St. Margaret's Anglican where she served for a long time as a pastor. To learn more about her work visit [the Anchorhold](#).

husband and I will deliver aircraft to various parts of the world for a mission organization. I am a friend of Kirsten's—we share a love of our work in counselling and for the Word of God. I feel so very honoured to have read through her book in manuscript form. I was given it to edit and all I did was underline the so many words that moved and delighted me.

Joanne: I and my family have attended St. Margaret's for 20 years, and I've been sub-organist for about 10 years (I think). I am a poet (my second book will be out in a few weeks). I came to this book because of Kirsten, having listened to her preach and lead worship at St. Margaret's, and having heard a little about this book from her as she was working on it.

RLN: Welcome everyone and thank you for being here. Alright, so let's get right into it. Kirsten, we are here to discuss your book, *Anchorhold: Corresponding with Revelations of Divine Love*, which is a series of letters that you write to the 14th century anchoress Julian of Norwich. Now, before we get into the meat of your letters, we need to know a couple of things just for context, namely: **Who is Julian of Norwich? And, why did you choose her as your spiritual teacher?**

Kirsten: So, who is Julian of Norwich is a really good question. Very little is actually known about her. We do know that she was an anchoress and also that she was a theologian. She was someone who knew what it was to understand the physical body in the presence of Christ, and the motherhood of God in unique ways. Within her life she experienced the Black Plague, which wiped out at least a third of the population in Norwich. She was also a mystic who had only one vision. Many of the mystics in the medieval era were people who saw multiple visions, but she only had one, and that was the revelation of Christ's face on the cross as enlivened and speaking to her in 16 shewings. She was not actually in the anchorhold when she had the vision. She was 30 years old, and it

is possible that she was married and had young children. I don't know whether that's true. But I do know that she was not necessarily a nun, and that she had a familial life. She probably went into the anchorhold when she was in her mid-late 40's, and she lived till about 74 years old. If you are an anchorite, you are sealed into a small room. In Julian's case, the room was attached to a church in the middle of the city. There is actually a funeral service said for you when you enter an anchorhold, because it is meant to be your entombment, your enfolding in Christ. So that was how Julian lived the last 20 or so years of her life. Anchorites were keepers of the church, but they also gave advice to the city dwellers. People came and asked for council and guidance from the anchorite who lived at the centre of the city and was present before God and praying for them. I should also say that I intentionally encountered Julian in and through her text. My teacher is the *Revelations of Divine Love*, not a character whose name is Julian of Norwich. Part of what I'm doing in my letters is reclaiming a kind of reading, an approach to a text which is *amateur*, meaning full of love. You can actually fall in love with a text and give yourself to learn it through that love.

The first time I encountered Julian's *Revelations* was in a Theology Survey course. I read one page of her, which was the motherhood of God page. And what shocked me was that she spoke so pungently of motherhood and used the pronoun 'he' for Christ. There wasn't this feminist agenda, but there was a seeing of the motherhood of Christ, and this was revolutionary to me. Then, I studied Charles Williams in my master's degree and I read the whole of her for the first time. And I thought: she is a theologian. She uses what Christ has given her—a vision—and a liveliness in her body to describe her found theological insights. And this astounded me. But, as I say in the beginning of the book, I may have loved her ideas but I didn't love her way of being. I was not ready to follow her way of being. Over the next ten years, though, I slowly began to turn. I had left St. Margaret's because I

needed to go quiet and attend to matters in my personal life. And at one point, after a period of rest, I saw Julian's text on my shelf, and I took down her book and read the first letter; I immediately wanted to write her a letter. This was the moment I knew what I was going to do.

RLN: Wow, thank you Kirsten. What a wonderful introduction to Julian and your book. There is an immense amount of material to unpack in this book, and I imagine we will have quite a breadth of questions. To get us started, I thought we could look at the first and second chapters, where you unpack Julian's interpretation of her own bodily sickness, which she understands as a "gift" from God that has pointed her towards a longing for Christ. I would like to open up the discussion to our participants.

Chris: I have a question here, and it's one that I've had for a very long time stemming from Christian mysticism. Julian spends time talking about her sickness, and clearly, she sees her sickness as the vehicle for her encounter with Christ. The part that I picked up on is that you also enter into your experience there—your emotional and physical sickness—and you seem to apply a kind of parallelism between you and Julian. That's the way I read it anyway. I'm also aware of the long Christian tradition that as we follow in the footsteps of Christ we have to follow in Christ's suffering in order to enter that deeper relationship to God. And I have to tell you, Kirsten, what do you do with someone like me who has never experienced that kind of deep sickness unto death. Does that mean that we can't enter into that deep relationship with Christ? There is almost an implication there! Is that kind of sickness and suffering really necessary for this process?

Kirsten: I think it was necessary for Julian of Norwich to experience a sickness unto death to perceive Christ's love in the way that she did. But I think it was necessary because it was given to her to long for it, and she therefore engaged

her longing and her experience. I think the key here is not so much the suffering as it is that she engaged her life. I think the danger is to preclude suffering in the danger of our life. I think we will not experience the fullness of God if we refuse the life we are given. And I think that is the temptation of all of us. It is to not express the longing, the suffering and the joys that we have been given in life. What I see in Julian is that she fully lived in that she was given—the longing for suffering—in order to enter into the passion. And she knew that it was a holy longing, and not some sick tendency to suffer. She was willing to take the risk of it. A risk that many of us are not willing to take, and therefore are not willing to receive the suffering that comes with the risk.

Chris: In fact, in some ways you are saying that the suffering might distract us.

Kirsten: Yes! It does! We want to run from pain and suffering! But a large part of embracing suffering is how we come into it.

Chris: Right. I think what you're saying to me is that I'm being distracted by the notion of "sickness unto death" and not asking the question of the whole life that surrounds that suffering.

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Kirsten: I think so. I'm also saying that we are *all* distracted by suffering. I would say you are right to bring up the issue of suffering, because it is often the reason we are not able to fully engage our lives.

Val: You have this great line, Kirsten, where you write that "we come to our vocations when we come to nothing and you're so sick that you have no power or control or pretense." I just think that's a beautiful line, and I hear that what you're talking about is the longings we have within us. Would you say that when we come to our vocations we come to our longings?

Kirsten: Yes, and I think I'm going to say the opposite thing from what I just said, which is that suffering can be a remarkably good teacher. That absolute vulnerability of sickness can open up that gate of finding your vocation, and freedom in it. You've hit a transparency to God. I think that for those who suffer, and who are undone, it might be easier to enter into one's life and vocation.

Joanne: You make a comment on page 48 where you say: "When my suffering comes within the cross, my pain can be displaced within his pain and opens up to the world's pain in love." Can you say a bit more about what that means to have your own suffering come within the cross?

Kirsten: Julian makes a huge point that she chooses the crucified Christ as her heaven. In a sense, she almost refuses to look up to heaven—to be relieved from it. I think she does that because it is her vocation, and in so doing she is relieved of her pain because she is so focused on *his* pain. Christ's pain displaces Julian's pain experientially, and that happens right at the beginning of the narrative. There is this moment where she is in great pain and dying, and as soon as the revelations begin the pain disappears. I think that part of what is going on in the narrative arch is this illustration that when you enter in, you are not just entering into a symbol, but a reality. Julian has moved

from being alive to herself to alive in him. So, I think what I mean when I say that my pain comes into the cross is that when I enter into this absoluteness or "all-ness," my concrete experience becomes enfolded within Christ's experience. And in that process, the compassion that Christ has for me is opened to others in love. In brief, this is the theological insight that I was working through and trying so hard to understand through Julian's text. But the experiential piece, is that when we are broken open and our suffering is no longer making us implode, it will make us expand. And this is witnessed by both the saints and those who have suffered profoundly. What they have experienced is no longer killing them, but rather giving them a life to share with others.

Chris: So, this is almost the opposite of much of the contemporary talk of faith healing, which is very individual. The idea is that healing flows from Christ to you and then it's done. What you're saying is precisely the opposite of that.

Kirsten: Yes!

Joanne: There's one point in the book where you address Julian saying I'm still far behind you yet. And, I think, I'm still far behind you in reading her and in working out some of these things. Especially on the idea of suffering and being open to the experience of others, and to others' suffering. You have mentioned that in some experiences, suffering can be unhelpful. But, and maybe it's not even fair to ask, how do we pray for others then? How do we love them, when a friend is suffering? What did Julian point you toward?

Kirsten: Well, that is a big question. I had an experience that shook me when I was working on letter ten, which is a doozy. It goes into Aquinas' suffering, and trying to understand how it functions. I had worked at this letter four times, and then one day, finally I was triumphant. I had been sitting on my porch when at that moment a woman I love walked up

the sidewalk weeping, saying her sister who was eight months pregnant had just learned that she had miscarried. And it all came undone. Because *it all comes undone*. And there is nothing to say. But there is a staying that Julian has expanded in me. A silent staying and a place which is the foot of the cross. That's all I got. But I think that what Julian showed me is that you can have a place where you can be *with* the suffering, a place that is big enough to hold it.

Chris: I was going to ask you about prayer in this book, as so much medieval literature is a manual on prayer. I admit, one of my misreadings of Julian is that I was looking for a manual on prayer, and it's not there. That's not what her book is about, or what your book is about. How do you find prayer coming out of this "sitting at the foot of the cross" that Julian talks about?

Kirsten: Well, the word that came to me was adherence. You get stuck closer to Christ. You get adhered to the will. The whole purpose of prayer is that it changes the inside of ones being to be more pliable to the will, to be freer within the will. Prayer seems to make for freedom. It enters into the space, which is the breadth and the love of God. The act of prayer is the constant coming into Christ's presence and being undone and expanded and enclosed, so that all of that can make a life.

Joanne: There was something I found really helpful that Julian says about prayer, near chapter seven, that you can pray for something whole heartedly but without staking your life of faith on a particular outcome. First of all, I think that is very helpful to those who fear that their faith is not enough. I'm thinking about someone I knew years ago who prayed for healing and it didn't happen and that lead to some serious doubts. But this is reassuring on that count. Although still very hard to do.

Val: I just think of that story you told, Kirsten, of the young woman walking up. You felt like

you had it all together, and then she walks up and you hear this story, and you were silenced. It brought you to nothing. And I wonder if in profound suffering the best thing is silence.

Joanne: I also find that the way the book is written – the letters and ongoing conversation – was more absorbing than if you were simply writing in the third person about it. It's very intimate. It's like we're reading along with you and struggling to understand Julian as you do.

Kirsten: This was important to me. I live best in conversation and relationship. It was exactly my desire of this book to be writing two ways, to be writing towards her and towards the reader, so that we are in a conversation that opens and therefore that we can all do the work and be invited into our own work.

RLN: I just want to take a step back here and ask the broader question in closing: How is Julian's theology good news for us today, in our current state of isolation and loneliness?

Kirsten: I think the good news is that your life can be found in a small enclosure, because it is always wrapped in Christ. The enclosedness of our lives right now is not the end of our life but the beginning of our life. The loneliness that encounters us is not fruitless, but the beginning, the opening, the invitation. Julian does not necessarily offer us a comfort that makes us feel better, but it offers us a comfort that our life is here. There is enough of life to be enclosed, and therefore to be free. Julian knew this deeply, as she wasn't just locked down for a year, but for 20 years. And yet her life makes the five of us sit here and talk in ways that is enlivening. She has given a true gift 650 years later. This time of quiet and solitude does not have to be deadening, but could be the beginning of life.

Copies of *Anchorhold: Revelations of Divine Love* can be ordered through [Kirsten's blog](#), or purchased wherever books are sold.

Friends of Emmanuel Mission Champion *Say Yes! to Kids*

[Friends of the Emmanuel Mission Winnipeg](#) have joined forces with the Anglican Foundation of Canada's (AFC) *Say Yes! to Kids* campaign to help raise money for an ambitious new program of support for a pandemic-impacted generation.

Say Yes! to Kids is AFC's response to concerns about COVID-19's impact on young people. This national campaign is meant to have local impact by raising \$100,000 to support champions for children, youth, and family ministry. "With everyone's help," says Susan Suppes, AFC Board Member from the Diocese of Rupert's Land, and an early supporter of the team fundraiser, "we can mobilize the church for a courageous, creative, and compassionate response and to benefit ministries right here in the Diocese of Rupert's Land."

In Winnipeg, the Friends of Emmanuel Mission are *Saying Yes! to Kids* by rallying support for the [Emmanuel Mission Summer Learning Program](#). This volunteer-led day camp, started in 2014, serves close to 100 South Sudanese and Dinka children and their families each year. The camp's program of enrichment includes tutoring, math and language supplements, teamwork, sports, singing, field trips and more. The Diocese of Rupert's Land has a strong history of providing grants in support of this program through Youth Ministry funds.

"The donors I have talked with understand the importance of helping children in our

communities," says Suppes, "Those of us supporting the campaign feel this is our way of building a better, more compassionate world. The *Say Yes to Kids* campaign is a step in the right direction."

To date there are close to ten *Say Yes! to Kids* fundraising teams registered, championed by Bishops, Diocesan Staff, AFC's Diocesan Representatives, and individuals who are passionate about ministry and outreach to young people. Just as with Friends of the Emmanuel Mission Winnipeg, many diocesan teams are identifying specific ministries they hope will benefit from the campaign once the funding stream begins to flow later this year.

"In our meetings across the country, we are seeing the emergence of a national story about outreach to children and youth," says The Ven. Peter Wall, Gift Consultant, AFC. "It's a story about compassion in the face of crisis. There are tireless champions for young people across the Canadian church who have been undeterred by the pandemic. They know exactly where and how new investments can be used to make an impact."

Since 2011, and the launch of the Kids Helping Kids Fund, AFC has invested over \$1 Million in ministries that benefit children, youth, and young adults in Canada. AFC will rely on the strength of its granting program to quickly turnaround *Say Yes! to Kids* campaign proceeds by funding a Request for Proposals (RFP) for youth-focused initiatives in fall 2021.

Say Yes! to Kids launched on April 6 and will run until June 30. Please visit www.anglicanfoundation.org/kids and join the [Friends of Emmanuel Mission Winnipeg](#) fundraising team or make a direct donation to support their efforts.



Reading for No Reason at All

RYAN SMITH



There is never enough time to read. This truism shapes the world we live in. Every moment has to be wrestled away from the time commitments and pressures that threaten to monopolize our time. Our families, friends, church community and careers are great gifts, but they all need our time.

Reading is no different. It seems selfish to read for pleasure. Every clause, paragraph and page must be justified for the benefit and the utility it offers. For myself, reading has slowly become a means to an end. For a student reading is useful because it is the ground of research. A teacher tends to read to evaluate their students. An accountant has the joy of reading endless piles of crumpled receipts in old Walmart bags. For many, reading is just another boring but useful tool.

Even for those precious few who carve out time to read a book on the couch at the end of the day can fall prey to reading out of a sense of duty, or social achievement. We dutifully trudge our way through the latest “must-read” book about politics or some other prestigious topic, finding brief relief in any moment when we can set our terrible book down.

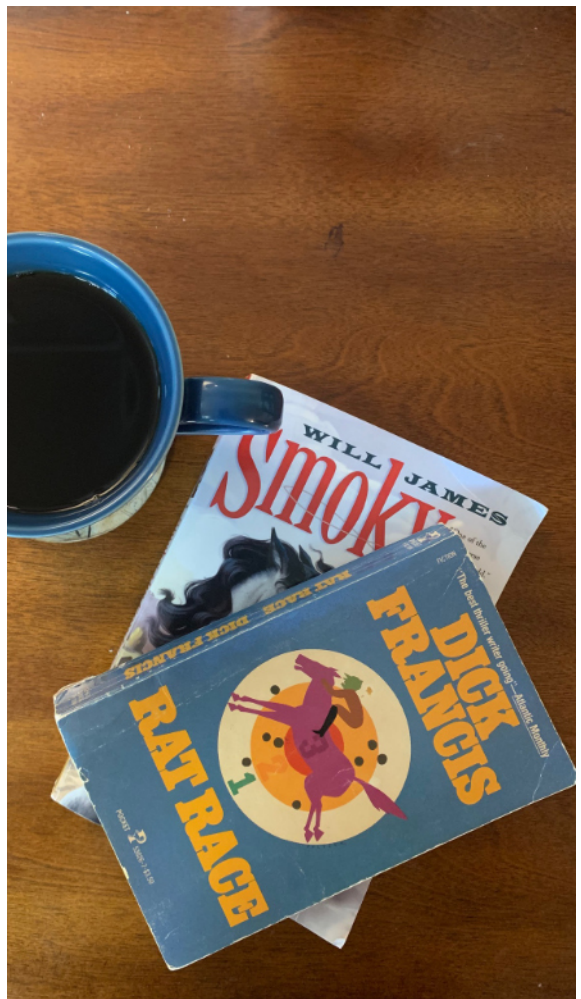
Can I recall the last time I read for pleasure? Do I remember the last time I read a page turner that I simply could not put down?

This past year reminded me of who I once was - a child who hid flashlights under his mattress and mysteries in the bathroom closet. There was a time when a new book would not leave my hand until I had read the very last period, no matter how early in the morning it was. Irresponsible, yes. Exhausting, of course. But it was the best way to read.

This past year has been a year of imposed change. No habit or routine was safe. Old patterns could no longer continue as they had. For my children school came to an abrupt end. An extended spring break became a road trip across Canada for a vacation at Grandma's,

which soon turned into months of virtual exile from their classmates and teachers.

One of the routines we couldn't leave behind was our six-year old's reading schedule. She was obligated to read fifteen minutes a day. She hated it. She was dragged to the book, and we watched her like a hawk to ensure she kept her eyes on the page. This nightly ritual became increasingly unworkable in the midst of unfolding chaos. It became a time of conflict, and we needed to try something else. Our plan was simple. My daughter and I would read together for a half hour every day. She would read her novel and I would read mine. Afterwards we would share the highlights.



In retrospect this small change in routine proved to be more significant than I had imagined. Up until this point, I had been reading like an adult focused on getting ahead. Not only in my profession as a student but also in my personal life. I read as a duty, to learn and to better myself as a human being. When the pandemic struck, I read to improve my understanding of pandemics. I read opinion pieces on pandemics and vaccines, historical accounts of the Spanish Flu and even Camus' *The Plague*. However, these were not stories that I could share with my daughter. So to find something to share with her, I dug up a book from my childhood, a murder mystery written by the famous jockey Dick Francis.

The daily ritual soon became a highlight for both of us. She giggled and shared stories about dragons and elves. I laughed and tried to share the parts of murder mysteries and thrillers that were appropriate and interesting for a seven-year-old. Mostly, however, we sat and read silently, occasionally interrupted by an errant younger sibling or a quick sip from her hot chocolate or my Rooibos tea. On warm evenings we sat on the deck and read as the sun slipped away, and on cold days we cuddled within arm's length of the fireplace. This time quickly became my favourite part of the day. And our daily schedule of leisure reading went on. I chose books to read on a whim, with the only other condition being their relative suitability for discussion. I forayed into Marianne Robinson's *Gilead*, followed by Shakespeare, and on the days that I felt lighter reading was in order, I read murder mysteries and spy thrillers.

Not once in all those months did I read anything I had to read. I read for pure pleasure. As time passed, I watched my daughter's passion for reading grow. Perhaps the most significant sign of kindled interest was the hot chocolate paradox. At the beginning of our times together her hot chocolate was quickly devoured, marshmallows and all, as soon as it was cool enough to drink. Weeks later I regularly found myself dumping cold hot chocolate down the sink, half a cup one night, a

third of a cup the next. What had begun as a passion for hot chocolate had slowly but surely transformed into a passion for the adventures found in the clauses and sentences before her, and it was worth every second.

This past year has been a hard one, and it is so easy to forget to carve out space and time for joy in our days. One of my favourite parts of participating in the daily office has been reading the Psalms, particularly those that evoke the joy and delight of the Creator. Of course, the classic is Psalm 29.6, "He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, which evokes a delightful picture of a joyful yet utterly pointless frolic. The joyful frivolity of the image reminds me to seek the deep joy that our Creator calls each of us towards.

The crowning moment came when my famously strong-willed daughter admitted to this ever so crucial fact, "Dad, I like reading now." In that moment I too came to a realization, that I too, along with my daughter, had rediscovered my love of reading.

This too points me back to the Psalms. For my daughter school had become a darkness, and reading had become a blight on her life. For myself, I struggled to find joy in my existential literature about a plague while I lived in a plague! Perhaps you too find yourself in darkness throughout this time, with little end in sight. And yet Psalm 18 says, "My God turns my darkness into light."

Perhaps this summer reading for joy at a whim might be a place where our darkness turns to light. Perhaps we will be able to find a cozy place in a park or a patio, with a favorite drink or snack and just read for no reason at all.



J. Ryan Smith is a former youth worker who loves exploring the hard questions about God and faith at Wycliffe College. In his spare time, he loves to read old books and play board games with his family.

Reading Like a Christian

SHELAGH BALFOUR

Photo: [Syd Wachs](#)

When our family gathered (virtually) last Christmas, I was delighted to find several books among my gifts. To be honest, I usually receive books for Christmas, but this gifting was unusual. Most years, the books come from my wish list; perhaps one or two find their way under the Christmas tree. This year, there were six, all from a single friend. Not one was from my list. My friend, who would far rather watch the movie than read the book, spent hours online searching out books she thought I would enjoy. She read synopses and previews. She searched out which book store carried each one and made multiple trips to pick them all up. This was a true gift of love.

A few years ago, the Parish of St. Peter, Winnipeg, formed a book group called *Reading for Life Together*. The group meets about seven times a year, with participants taking turns selecting the books and facilitating the discussions which are wide-ranging and dynamic. I think all who participate would agree we've become better readers because of them. This group is also a gift of love.

The connection between my Christmas gift

and *Reading for Life Together* is that the books are not my choice. They take me out of the well-trod path of my usual reading and expose me to ideas and authors I might never have considered on my own. At times they challenge me personally in ways that are uncomfortable, and it takes real determination to continue reading. In those times, commitment to others gives me the motivation to continue on.

The declared purpose of the book group is *learning together to read for the deeper questions of life and faith*. That is, in our discussions we hope to learn how to read books with discernment from the perspective of our faith in the Triune God. We want to learn how to read like Christians.

Not everyone will have the same idea of what it means to read like a Christian, which is hardly surprising in a landscape littered with multiple versions of what it means to be a Christian. While I cannot style myself an expert on the subject, I have a pretty clear idea of what I think it means to read from the perspective of a disciple of Christ. I have an equally clear idea

of what it doesn't mean.

For a start, reading like a Christian is not (for the most part) about the kinds of books you read. It doesn't require confining yourself to scripture, devotional reading, and theological texts. It is not reading novels exclusively by authors known to be Christian or those with explicitly Christian story lines. Nor is it reading books that have no sex, no violence, and no swearing. There are exceptions here, but I will get to those in a moment.

When it comes to how we read, reading from a Christian perspective does not mean approaching a book like a treasure hunter seeking Christian themes hidden beneath the text. Not that such themes cannot be found – David S. Cunningham, author of *Reading is Believing*, uses the works of authors as varied as Shakespeare, P.D. James, and Nikos Katsantzikis, to explain core beliefs of the Christian faith. However, any such connections, if they are there, are best left to appear of their own accord rather than distorting one's reading by explicitly hunting for them.

So, with all those 'nots behind us, how does someone read like a Christian? In his book *Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books*, author Tony Reinke writes that, "lit from within by the Holy Spirit, a Christian reads in the light of Jesus Christ." This is an excellent orientation but turns us towards the same problem I noted earlier: not every professing Christian will agree either on what exactly the light of Christ reveals or what we ought to do with it.

Whatever the style or content of the book we pick up, reading requires discernment from the one who engages in it. From the start, when choosing a book, we exercise discernment as we select some titles and leave others behind. Once we begin to read, we exercise discernment as we go along: Does the book make sense? Does it fit with our worldview or does it challenge our worldview in ways that make us think? Is the author an engaging writer? Am I comfortable with the content of the book? If not, what does my discomfort mean? What reading from a Christian perspective does for these and many other possible questions is

provide the foundation from which our discernment flows.

Our starting point as Christian readers, then, is to know our own story from creation to Parousia. Through our faith we develop a specific worldview that places Christ and not ourselves at the centre. We are creature and not Creator and we are, as the body of Christ, a people of community. Within this community, we learn how to love one another as Christ loves us.

Being a Christian gives us a particular hope for the world and the responsibility to work toward the fruition of that hope. We know that our lives are not in our hands and our future is secured by a God who loves us without limit.

With that as our grounding, we can read critically, engaging in informed discussion with the author, discerning where their worldview and ethic intersects with ours and where it diverges. We may find that reading a book we wholly disagree with actually helps us clarify our own thoughts. Equally, we may discern that a given book is not for us. As I suggested earlier, there are books whose content or purpose – exploitation, glorification of violence, racism, or misogyny for example – are incompatible with a commitment to 'respect the dignity of every human being.' It may be wisest to pass those by.

The gift of books we do not choose offers us the chance to hone our skills in critical discernment from a Christian perspective, but we should not stop there. Bringing the same discernment to our old favourites may well result in surprising discoveries that bring our appreciation to a whole different level.

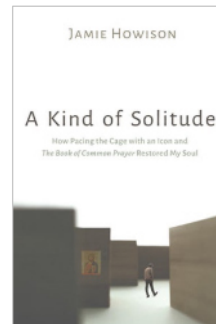


Shelagh is a member of St. Peter's Winnipeg, where she is Deacon, Parish Administrator, and Theological Advisor to Outreach Ministry. She can't imagine a life without a pile of books waiting to be read.

A Kind of Solitude

by Jamie Howison

THEO ROBINSON



Grief is a powerful emotion. We experience it acutely when it stems from a sudden event, but also during those times when we think we are prepared for it. Perhaps it is more easily managed when a loved one dies after years of illness or peacefully in their nineties, as opposed to when a loved one dies of a heart attack in their forties, but grief is still painfully experienced in both situations. That said, our experiences of grief and our attitudes towards grief differ greatly from one another, and what is grieved is not always death.

When Jamie Howison's marriage broke down after eighteen years, it "came to an abrupt end, something [he] had not seen coming." Howison fell into a deep grief that threatened to drag him down until a friend urged him to seek out spiritual direction. By providence, a letter arrived the day of that conversation from a friend of Jamie's, Father Gary Thorne, who at the time was the Chaplain at the University of King's College in Halifax.

A Kind of Solitude is Jamie's telling of the five weeks he spent at King's College five months after the end of his marriage, attempting to rediscover himself and find healing for his broken heart and soul.

During his time at King's College, Jamie spent the majority of his time in solitude, sometimes reading and journaling, sometimes walking the streets around campus or pacing the floor of his residence room, but also praying and writing an icon under the tutelage of one of the College's students. As well, Jamie attended the multitude of services that were available at the College Chapel, had conversations with Father Gary, embarked on a retreat, and spent time with family. The retreat was an intense and

highly structured five weeks, specifically designed by Father Gary to help Jamie in the best possible way.

Many personal demons are battled throughout these chapters – anger, resentment, bitterness, hurt, fear – demons that many of us have experienced during times of deep grief. Jamie acknowledges that not everyone will have the time or opportunity that he did to address these demons, but that he is extremely grateful for this gift that he was given because by the end of it, he "began to be free."

In the final pages, my own grief became apparent to me as I read about Jamie's last days at King's College. Jamie quotes Father Thorne as saying, "this is a community that always has room for the broken-hearted." It was at this point that I felt a shift in Jamie's soul, and I, as the reader, knew that he would come out of this experience ready to face what was next.

Jamie Howison was one of my first mentors as I journeyed the path to priesthood. I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to read his book, as I have experienced it as an extension of his mentorship. And, I have some of my own work to do about past events in my life that I have considered too painful to address. Jamie's story is demonstrative for me in its vulnerability. As Jamie shares his grief with us, we are invited into a state of compassion for him but also for our own untold griefs. By example, we are given hope that our pain might one day make us stronger.

- *Theo Robinson, Incumbent at St. Michael's Anglican Church in Victoria Beach. Follow him on his [blog](#) or [Facebook page](#).*

What is the Anglican Church? by Anthony Waterman

JAMIE HOWISON

Depending on who one asks, the response to the question "What is the Anglican Church?" will elicit quite an array of answers. When posed to Dr. Anthony Waterman, the question has resulted in a compact little book with a decided focus on the history of the church in England over the past five hundred years. The book was written at the request of Brent Neumann during his tenure as the Incumbent of All Saints Church and published by the parish as a resource for visitors, enquirers, and even parishioners who might not have a working knowledge of the roots of the Anglican Church. In his introductory commendation for the book, Bishop Geoff Woodcroft characterizes it as "an insightful, and even playful, well-written history lesson," adding, "I must admit, that in reading it, I felt as though I was brushing-up on my lessons." That's hardly surprising, as not only is Dr. Waterman a careful and knowledgeable thinker, but he also had the assistance of Diarmaid MacCulloch in producing the final draft of the book. In this introduction, Dr. Waterman characterizes Professor MacCulloch as "the leading authority on the English Reformation," adding "If this were an academic publication, he would be co-author."

While *What is the Anglican Church?* is not an academic publication, it is not without substance. The format of this forty-three-page book might strike some readers as being something of an extended FAQ sheet, as it follows a question-and-answer format. That format, though, long predates the FAQ sheet, dating back to the "Socratic Dialogues" produced at the turn of the fourth century BCE.

Dr. Waterman begins with a brief chapter called "Origins," in which he opens with basic questions such as "What is a diocese?" and "What is a bishop?" and then gradually moves to the matter of the break of the Church of England from the Church of Rome, which folds

neatly into chapters tracing the history of the church in England, from the Reformation through to the 20th Century. It must be noted that it is the English church that is most in view, which may disappoint readers who were looking for something more focused on the Anglican Church of Canada. Yet knowing those English roots is important in understanding where our own worship patterns have come from, and why, for instance, surpliced choirs and processional crosses had become so very common in Canadian parishes by the 1960s.

What is perhaps most striking is his emphasis on the place of worship, which surfaces on the first page of his introduction:

"The Anglican Church is unique among the other ancient churches of Christendom in having no 'denominational doctrine of its own; moreover it has always been far less interested in doctrine of any kind than in worship."

This view is explored in some detail in his closing chapter, "Doctrine and Worship," which opens with the statement, "Christianity is what we *do*: not what we say *about it*." In Dr. Waterman's view, "Worship of God in the 'breaking of the bread' is still the definitive work of the Church." Not that this is the only thing that we do, for as he notes, the breaking of bread requires that we be "in love and charity with [our] neighbours, and intend to lead a new life." No small work!

I would have to say that this volume is probably best suited to the person who wants to know more about the tradition in which he or she is already a participant, or indeed to those of us who have been in holy orders for decades and quite appreciate the "brushing-up on our lessons" offered by Dr. Waterman.

- Jamie Howison, Rector of saint benedict's table in Winnipeg

Copies of the book are free while they last and can be obtained by contacting Joy Peters, Church Administrator, All Saints Church, office@allsaintswinnipeg.ca, 204 786-4765.