



THE VALYERMO  
Chronicle

SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY

NUMBER 257 ✨ SUMMER 2018

## LETTER *from the* ABBOT

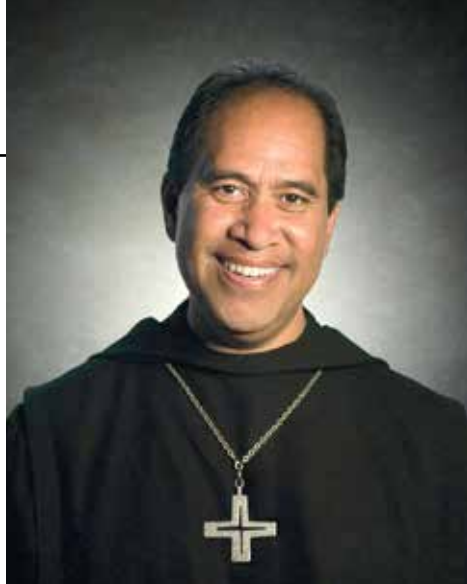
*Dear Friends,*

**D**URING HOLY COMMUNION AT a Sunday Mass at the Abbey, a little girl who looked to be about 5 or 6 years old, and who appeared to have Down syndrome, came up to receive Communion, accompanied by her parents. Thinking the little girl was not of age to receive Holy Communion, the priest was ready to give the little girl a blessing rather than Holy Communion. The father of the girl who was standing behind her, whispered to the priest, “Father, she has made her First Holy Communion.”

So the priest gave the Eucharist to the little girl, who received it in her hand. However, rather than consuming the Host immediately as is customary, the little girl walked away with the Host in her hands. The concerned priest asked the father, “Is she going to consume the Host?” The father assured the priest that she would.

The little girl took a seat in the front pew with her mother, holding the Host in her hands. I myself was distributing the Precious Blood and was able to ‘keep an eye’ on the little girl to make sure she would consume the Host. But all she did was look at it. I was growing a little impatient as I waited for the girl to consume the Host. She continued to look at it and stare at it. It was odd. Nevertheless, I was vigilant in my duty as priest to ‘protect the Lord’ from this little girl. So I kept my eyes peeled on the girl, as I distributed the Precious Blood.

For what seemed like an eternity, she sat in that front pew and continued to stare at the Host in the palm of her hand, while I continued to stare at her, (while others I’m



sure were staring at me!) Finally, she slowly picked up the Host with the index finger and thumb of her other hand, as if she were handling something delicate and fragile . . . and holy. She turned it this way and that, as if inspecting it. Her eyes and mind intently fixed and focused on precisely what it was she was holding. It was as if she was thinking, ‘Is this real’? Is it really Who they say it is?

At this point, I realized I was witnessing something profoundly beautiful and intense. I believed I was witnessing a little girl (probably) with Down syndrome ‘assenting’ to the Real Presence: accepting, agreeing, believing the mystery of God made man; the mystery of the Sacrifice on Calvary made present at that moment; of the bodily Resurrection of the Lord; of the Paschal Mystery. Once I realized, I was moved to the core and brought to tears.

If it’s possible to see ‘believing’, then that is what I saw. I saw her ‘believing’ in God—pondering and meditating and contemplating the mystery in her hands: *This* is Jesus! *This is* Jesus! *This is* Jesus!

The more I watched this interaction between creature and Creator, between the Lover and His beloved, the more humbled

I was. The Creator in the hands of a Down syndrome little girl, who in believing and understanding and loving the Lord in the Eucharist, taught a priest with post graduate degrees in theology how to gaze, contemplate, and believe on the Lord in this most Blessed Sacrament.

May we be ever watchful and open to the mysteries of God unfolding before us through the 'little ones' of the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen!

“God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God.” (1 Corinthians 1:27–29).

Abbot Damien ✘



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John Macallan Swan (1846–1910),  
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**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *I first heard the rhythm of the liturgical hours referred to as "Dark, Dawn, Day, Dusk" in a workshop presentation given by Fr. Simon O'Donnell at Valyermo in 2003. I expanded on his original idea in this essay that I wrote for my graduate students in the Gonzaga University course, "Leadership and Community," who for the last twelve years have spent a week at St. Andrew's immersed in the dynamics of the monastic community there as part of the semester-long online course.*



# ARK AWN AY & USK

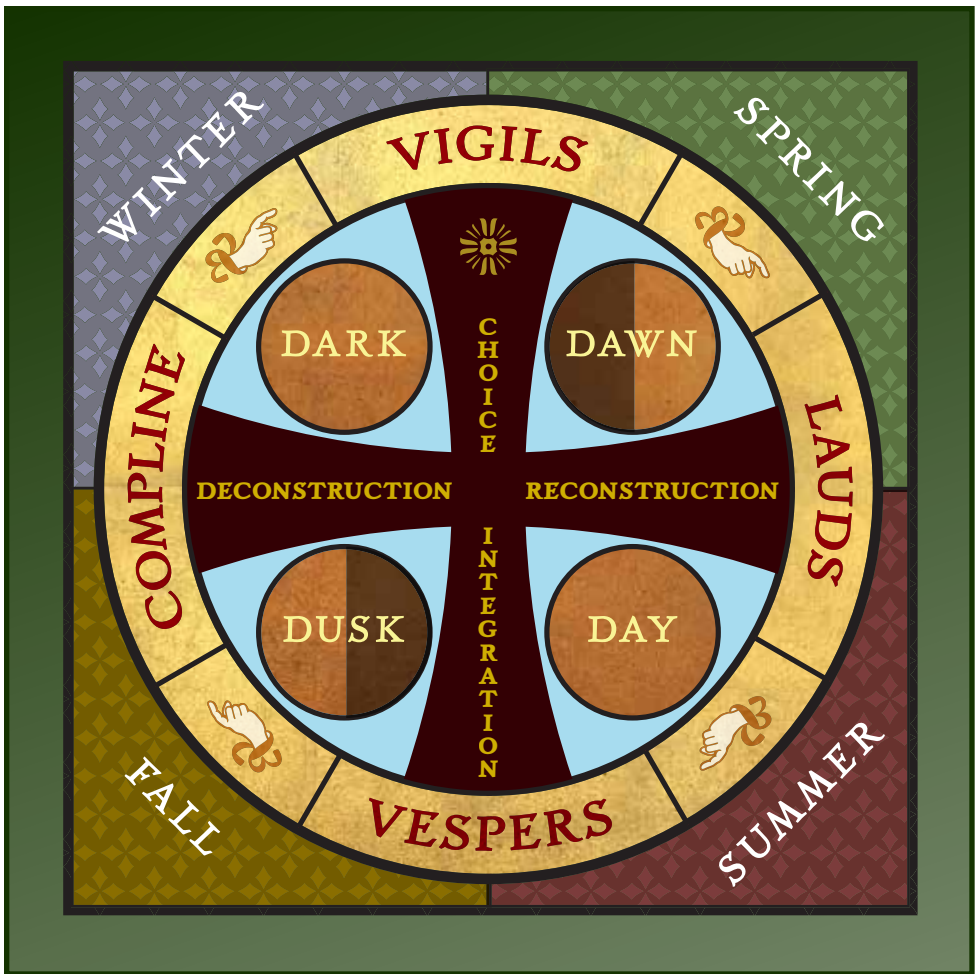
**BY MICHAEL R. CAREY, PH.D., OBLATE O.S.B.**

*Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington*

ONE OF THE THINGS that has ALWAYS STRUCK ME ABOUT MY visits to Saint Andrew's Abbey is how much I feel in touch with the rhythms of the day and night there. This might be because the Abbey is located in the upper Mojave Desert of Southern California, and the cold nights and hot days make one more conscious of where the sun is (and isn't). Perhaps it is also because there is a very clear delineation between the seasons in the upper desert. And it may be that there is something about the desert that heightens both our senses and our consciousness in general.

I think that my feeling of being "in-sync" with the world around me is most intense for me when I join the monks as they gather at key transition points of the day and night to pray

together. For the monks of St. Andrew's, the four key daily transitions that are acknowledged every twenty-four hours are dark (-to-dawn), dawn (-to-day), day (-to-dusk), and dusk (-to-dark).



**DARK (TO DAWN): VIGILS**

EACH MORNING, THE MONKS arise while it is still dark outside and enter their chapel to pray Vigils. The chapel is dimly lit, the main light being focused on a lectern from which three different readings will be proclaimed to the community. Interspersed among these three readings—one from the Hebrew scriptures, one from the writings of a holy person, and one from the Gospels—is the monks’ recitation of the psalms, alternating their voices from one side of the chapel to the other. The psalms that they chant often

include the famous “cursing” psalms, normally excluded from public worship in the Catholic Church because they speak of “bashing in the heads” of your enemies’ children and other (equally nasty) thoughts. However, I think it is very appropriate to recite these psalms at vigils.

After I have had a particularly bad day, interacting with particularly difficult people, I have trouble sleeping. Sometimes I wake up (usually about 3 a.m.) feeling a tremendous amount of anger and resentment, often specifically directed toward one of my colleagues at work. I “feel” that there is no solution to my problems with this person, and so my mood is as dark as is my bedroom — as dark as the world is at

3 a.m. I feel like I do when I am very physically ill and am awake in the middle of the night: i.e., I feel that I will always be sick. It is similar to my mood in the wintertime, especially around February, in that I feel like it will always be cold, and the ground will always be brown and hard, and I will always feel miserable.

But the night always ends, winter invariably comes to a close, I feel better and there turn out to be options for dealing with my difficult colleague. Spring happens; the dawn comes. And as the monks leave the chapel after vigils, it is twilight and the sun is seen coming up on the horizon. Vigils, therefore, represents for me the choice I make throughout my life to move away from despair and toward meaning, to grow and develop.



### (TO DAY): LAUDS

I AM A MORNING PERSON. I LOVE the smell and feel of the morning. Mornings are ripe with possibility and promise. What I will be doing during the day still stretches out in front of me. At dawn, I am as awake as I ever am going to be during the day.

In the morning, the monks return to the chapel for Lauds, which means praise. The psalms they chant are songs of praise and of promise, celebrating life and salvation. As they leave the chapel, they enter into a world of activity: breakfast, meetings, and work. The day has begun. It reminds me of spring, when the bulbs planted in the ground long ago begin to bring forth colorful flowers, when the trees in my front yard form pink blossoms, when I begin to see my neighbors again as I venture outside after the “hibernation” of the winter months.

Dawn is a metaphor for possibilities. We look at our planned activity with anticipation, and we intend the best: we will be healthy today, we will respond authentically to those whom we meet, we will work productively, we

will accomplish something good. At lauds, the monks pray that all that will happen, by their effort and by the grace of God. When they leave the chapel, they immediately get thrown into the day’s activity. The “choice” they made at vigils to turn their backs on meaninglessness has led to this moment of salvation, of re-construction. In his song *Anthem*, Leonard Cohen sings “The birds they sang / at the break of day / Start again / I heard them say.” Day has come.



### (TO DUSK): VESPERS

WHETHER THE WORK IS WITH our hands or with our minds, it requires tremendous energy for us to move through the day. For the farmer as much as for the office worker, the carpenter or the business executive, the day is filled with planning and decisions, with encountering others and overcoming difficulties, with success and failure. All of our activities require nourishment: we need food for our bodies, intellectual challenge for our minds, and sense-making for our souls.

We want the plans we had at daybreak to come to some fruition by the end of the day. Soil tended to in the spring needs to be fully productive in the summer. Given a choice to meet the day rather than hide in the night, to re-construct our world and ourselves, Vespers represents a time for the monks to bring together, not just themselves into the chapel, but all of the work that has been done throughout the day: it is a time of integration, of seeing everything in a larger context, of resting in work well done.

Additionally, the end of the workday brings thoughts of rest; without some “down-time,” we know we will burn out. So, too, the monks gather together when the sun is low on the horizon, when light of the day that clarified the work to be done is now retreating into twilight. Vespers is the prayer time that acknowledges

this transition between day and dusk, between work and rest. It is time for dwelling on what is, rather than thinking ahead to what will be, for thanksgiving to God for the day's blessing rather than the morning's supplication for God's grace. As the monks leave the chapel after Vespers, things are beginning to move more slowly, and the sun is setting.

**DUSK** (TO DARK): **COMPLINE**

WHEN WE REACH A CERTAIN AGE, we begin to look backwards on our life more than we look forward. We may know that we have accomplished much, but we begin to reflect on what we have left unaccomplished: dreams, hopes, and possibilities. Perhaps all of the work we have done, all the things that were so important to us, all the energy expended on essential activities, are things that will no longer be remembered, forgotten by younger people who have their own work, energy, and essential activities. As we see younger people stepping up to actualize *their* potential, it is a bittersweet experience.

The end of our day with its limitations on what can be accomplished by us is very evocative of the feelings we have about the end of life. What has my day been like? What have I done well, what done poorly, and what left undone? Where in my day have I been an instrument of the greater good, of God's will, and where have I been self-satisfied? No wonder that at Compline, the prayer at the very end of wakefulness for the monks, they return to a darkened chapel, ask forgiveness for their sins, and pray for God's protection through the darkness to come. Like the approaching winter that will lay waste to the fruit of our spring, summer, and fall, we fear that what we have been will simply be laid waste by our death. The Dark awaits us, and at Compline the monks pray for God's protection and blessing. ❄



# PRODIGAL RECONCILIATION

FR. PATRICK SHERIDAN, OSB

UALA O’LOAN, A COLUMNIST for *The Irish Catholic*, wrote the following about the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession):

Most people have written confession off as irrelevant, not something they think about or talk about, and something which they rarely engage with in sacramental terms. The old link between confession and Eucharist no longer seems to exist in the consciousness of many of us. It may be suggested that it was of another time, another age. Where once long lines of people waited patiently for their “turn” on a weekly or fortnightly basis, now confessions are advertized as being available for at most 30 minutes or so in most churches, because people quite simply don’t turn up.

While some parishes I’ve visited leave slightly more time for confessions than thirty minutes, it seems the long lines of people waiting their turn occur only twice a year, during Lenten and Advent Penance Services.

I wonder why. After all Jesus told us to go to confession and he even taught us how to do it. What’s that? You say you missed that part in the Gospels? Well don’t worry. Take out your Bible and turn to the Gospel of Luke 15: 11–32.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son may be the most beloved of Jesus’ parables, rivaled only by the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The Prodigal Son made a good confession. Of course, he wasn’t Catholic; Catholics didn’t exist yet. There were no confessional rooms in the back of synagogues like there are in Churches today. And he didn’t use the opening formula: Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. And, no, he didn’t receive a formal penance from a validly ordained priest or say an act of contrition. So how can it be said that he made a good confession? Because all the elements that the Church says are necessary for a good, valid confession are present in this story, either explicitly or implicitly. You can check your Catechism or, if you’re in a hurry, you can Google “necessary elements for a good confession.” There are four elements of a good confession: *contrition*, *confession*, *absolution*, and *satisfaction*. Contrition, confession and satisfaction are acts of the penitent; absolution is, of course, the action of the priest.

So let’s look at the confession of the Prodigal Son.

It is obvious that he is in a state of mortal sin. Now some Christian traditions say that there is no such thing as *mortal* sin: it’s not in the Bible. Oh yes it is! In his first letter, in Chapter 5, St. John speaks of it as “deadly sin” or “sin unto death.” He makes a distinction





“We must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother *was dead* and has come to life again.”

The older brother got it. He didn’t say, “My brother isn’t dead! He’s at the party having a great time with his friends. That’s why I’m so upset!” He knew his father was speaking of spiritual death. The younger son had cut himself off completely from his father and the rest of his family by rejecting them and pursuing his own selfish will. Hell has been described as totally cutting oneself off from God and preferring one’s will to his — eternal solitary confinement. And the worst part is — you chose it. You — not God. God doesn’t send anyone to hell; we send ourselves. So the Prodigal Son was in a state of mortal sin.

So how did the reconciliation happen? Well, first there was *contrition*. The younger son experienced true sorrow for his sins. But it’s very clear from the details of the story that his contrition was not what we would call perfect. The younger son didn’t say, “I can’t believe I could have

been so unfeeling and disrespectful to my Father. What was I thinking? I’m going to tell him I’m sorry.” Instead he said, “I’m hungry and I’m taking care of unclean animals. My father’s servants are living better than I. I’ll go back and tell him I’m sorry and I’ll at least get three square meals a day and have a roof

between this type of sin and lesser sins, which we would call venial sins.

The fact that the Prodigal Son is in a state of deadly or mortal sin can be inferred from what the father says to his older son at the end of the parable, after the boy gets upset that his father has thrown a big party for his wayward brother.

been so unfeeling and disrespectful to my Father. What was I thinking? I’m going to tell him I’m sorry.” Instead he said, “I’m hungry and I’m taking care of unclean animals. My father’s servants are living better than I. I’ll go back and tell him I’m sorry and I’ll at least get three square meals a day and have a roof

*Continued on page 17*

## BOOK REVIEW

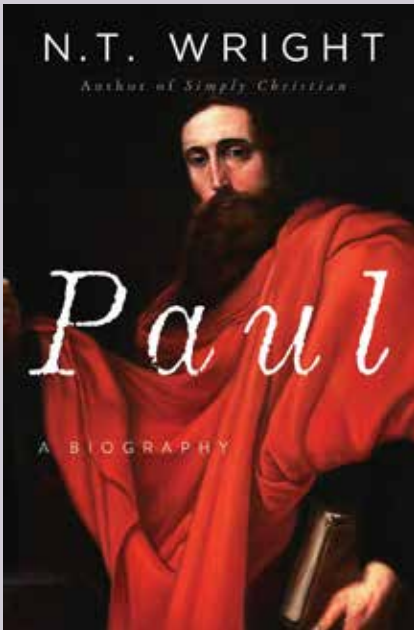
FR. PHILIP EDWARDS, OSB



WHEN I SEEM TO BE MORE TRULY “on the mark,” I begin the morning getting-up process by praying the Creed—usually the “Apostles’,” but occasionally the “full monty” of the Nicene embedded in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration—and so, “looking forward, blessed in faith, to the coming of the Lord,” who is Jesus the Anointed, in the glory of the Father and the power of their Holy Spirit, who will judge the living and the dead and the world by the fire of His/their Love = *hesed* & *emeth*, I profess to be a Christian and hope (as we sing at Lauds of Monday of the second week) “to live more nearly as we pray” this very day. These words and ideas so meaningful for life to me are found in the letters of Saint Paul and the other writers witnessing to the Apostolic Tradition in what is called The New Testament.

The texts themselves — the Pauline “corpus” of letters traditionally ascribed to him and the biographic “bits and speeches” concerning Saul of Tarsus/Paul the Apostle found in the book of the Acts of the Apostles — are part of the Tradition of the nascent apostolic community of what we have creedally come to call “the holy catholic and apostolic” Church, which came itself to recognize these writings as sharing the divine authority of the Scriptures of the parent Old Covenant community.

The canonical collection of St. Paul’s letters seems to have been arbitrarily arranged by length beginning with Romans (16 chapters) and ending with Philemon (1 chapter). Even the “dupled” letters, I & II Corinthians, Thessalonians, and Timothy, are ordered with longer text first rather than chronologically by date of composition. When St. Paul incorporates into his own text what seems to be an already popular hymn, such as the “Carmen



## Paul

*A Biography*

Nicholas Thomas Wright

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Christi” of Philippians 2:5–11, one can conjecture about earlier writings or oral traditions, but the consensus is that Paul’s letters are the earliest witness to the beliefs of the early Christian community.

Having been raised with a conservative (but not fundamentalist) reverence for the Scriptures as the Word of God and “Gospel Truth” and suspicious of the liberties and sophisticated “worldliness” of the “higher Criticism” and its promulgators, I was ripe for my monastery’s gift of a European theological education at a fertile time of *ressourcement* and refinding of scriptural roots in Catholic rite and teaching. I found I could still read simply, while being wisely and humbly aware of the many “complexities” present when the letter seems to kill

and the Word’s Spirit breathes life. Joining our congregation’s *delicade*, which at that time was at our motherhouse, the then still resolutely francophonic Saint-Andre-les-Bruges, I was privileged to hear at first hand Dom Jacques du Pont, Council *peritus* and part of the team producing *La Bible de Jerusalem*, particularly the Book of Acts. His lectures, intensely fact-filled and meticulously *au courant* with whatever school of criticism was in vogue, were sometimes difficult but never dust-filled, truly faithful to Hebrews 4:12, where the “word of God is living... active... discerning... the heart.”

N.T. Wright, bishop and scholar of the Church of England, wonderfully fulfills what one expects of that English tradition in a way spelled out in one of the dust-jacket blurbs to the book under review as a “combination of erudition, intuition, and mature wit and wisdom.” He has previously set the groundwork for the “detailed historical and theological study of [Paul’s] letters in debate with ongoing scholarship... [in works ranging from] *The Climax of the Covenant* (1991/1992)... [to] *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (2015).” But, he notes, “the biographer’s questions are subtly different. We are searching for the man behind the texts” (Preface).

He differs from what I have often relayed from respected commentaries to Bible classes and retreatants that I Thessalonians, with its prominent expectations of an imminent Second Coming, is the earliest written witness to the presence and beliefs of the early Christian community. He sees the primary example of the zealous inbreaking of the Good News of the Messiah/King in the “writing of Paul’s first letter... to the churches in Galatians... around AD 48” (p. 142). What matters here is that we can comfortably continue to read the Acts of the Apostles as it stands, as well as the Pauline letters. (The “Pastorals” to Timothy and Titus are bothersome, however: “Those most tricky of Pauline pieces, the so-called Pastoral Letters

[are] in my judgment, far harder to fit not only into Paul's travel plans, but into Paul's writing style than any of the other relevant material.... The changes required for us comfortably to ascribe to Paul the letters we call 1 Timothy and Titus, especially, are of a different kind to those required for us to accept Ephesians and Colossians, more too than those required for us to recognize those two other very different letters, 1 and 2 Corinthians, as both from the same hand," p. 394.)

In his Introduction, Wright tells us how he and his young friends

were reading Paul in the light of fairly typical concerns of some parts of the church in the 1960s and 1970s [not wanting] to know what this or that preacher or professor thought, but what Paul himself thought... what Paul himself was trying to say... inspired by God... charged with the grandeur of divine truth... meaning... sought by prayer and faith rather than by historical inquiry, even though, of course, those words themselves, if one is going to understand them, require careful study precisely of their lexical range in the world of the time.... I hasten to add that I still see Paul's letters as part of "holy scripture". I still think that prayer and faith are vital, nonnegotiable parts of the attempt to understand them, just as I think that learning to play the piano for oneself is an important part of trying to understand Schubert's impromptus. But sooner or later... [we] come to the questions of this book: who Paul really was, what he thought he was doing, why it "worked" and, within that, what was the nature of the transformation he underwent on the road to Damascus. (pp. 6-7)

Each chapter of this book (including the Introduction but not the Preface) begins with a facing-page map. The Introduction and the last chapter, "The Challenge of Paul," share

the same map: "Paul's World." It is physically small, only the eastern Mediterranean from Rome to Jerusalem. Gaul and Iberia, and the rest of North Africa from Carthage to the Gates of Hercules (that is, the western Mediterranean) are completely out of the picture, while Rome itself, with Sicily and Malta, barely make the squeeze to stay within the left-hand border. It may well be simply a question of either/or both economic/aesthetic concern not to have to turn the book on its side or to require a magnifying glass to make out a minusculed image, but it is certainly apt for the keeping-within-the-bounds impression our texts give us, the Hellenic *œcumene* being gripped by the burgeoning Roman Empire, truly the cradle of Western culture.

Torah-steeped zealot and Pharisee, yet comfortably competent in the language of the Gentile philosophers, and firmly claiming his rights as a Roman citizen, Saul of Tarsus appears on the scene in the narrative of the Book of Acts as an approving bystander of the stoning of Stephen by fellow Hellenic zealots in Jerusalem, perhaps studying under an illustrious elder or simply for a solemn feast, but not in time to witness to the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus himself. One assumes that he is perhaps only a few years younger than the Nazarene whom he will most definitely encounter in His Resurrection glory on the road to Damascus, a real physical experience, giving him the claim to the title Apostle (even though it would not have been enough to qualify him for the succession to the place of Judas that was given to Matthias in Acts 1:2-26). Convinced

that Israel's God had done what he always said he would; that Israel's scriptures had been fulfilled in ways never before imagined; and that Temple and Torah themselves were not after all the ultimate realities, but instead glorious sign posts pointing forward to the

new heaven-and-earth reality that had come to birth in Jesus. Paul remained to his dying day fiercely loyal to Israel's God, seen in fresh and blinding focus in Jesus. [He and] his communities...were focused on what we might call *messianic eschatology*: the belief that the One God had acted climactically and decisively in, and even *as*, Israel's Messiah. A shocking and blinding reality. (p. 54)

Baptized, healed and commissioned in Damascus, Paul begins to set the pattern of his life as Apostle to the Gentiles: check in first with the local synagogue, be expelled and reviled, and find refuge and repose in the homes and gathering places of receptive Jews or God-seeking Gentiles — and occasionally resort to “desert-time,” whether in Arabia itself, as after/during Damascus, or with good friends like Aquila and Prisca.

Wright gives us a chronological table that indicates a probable ten-year span between the first missionary journey (Cyprus and southern Galatia), that occasioned the letter to the Galatians, and the writing of the letter to the Romans, shortly before the trial and sentencing in Jerusalem that brought him to Rome itself — a sturdy Roman arch with Galatians and Romans the solid springers and Colossians/Ephesians the exalted keystone.

Galatians — that impassioned scold — “O, foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you!” (Gal 3:1) — that anchors our Lenten Vespers Office (kicked off, to be sure, by the peroration of II Corinthians 13:5–14: “Examine yourselves... Mend your ways”):

is part of the Bible — warts and all, sharp edges and sarcastic remarks included. Perhaps, indeed, that is what ‘holy scripture’ really is — not a calm list of truths to be learned or commands to be obeyed, but a jagged book that forces you to grow up in your thinking as you grapple with it. In any

case, I [Wright] do not think that when Paul began to dictate the letter... he was thinking, ‘This will be part of ‘scripture.’’ However, he believed that the one God had called him to be the apostle to the non-Jews, the Gentiles. He believed that Jesus had revealed himself to him and commissioned him with the news of Jesus’ victory over death and his installation as Lord. Paul believed that Jesus’ own spirit was at work through him to establish and maintain the life-changing communities of people whose lives had themselves been changed by the power of the gospel. And now he believed, as part of that, that he had a responsibility to state clearly what was at stake in the controversy in Antioch, in Jerusalem, in Galatia itself” (pp. 142–143)

Romans, the facing springer at the other end of the arch, while resuming, refining and expounding much of the teaching and admonitions of Galatians is in quite a different mode, addressing a community not of his own founding and perhaps uncertain of his orthodoxy and genuine apostolicity; it is closer to ‘treatise’ than ‘letter.’ Wright devotes several pages to Paul’s “great letter to Rome... in a different category from [his] other letters for many reasons, particularly for its careful and powerful structure... in four sections, each of which has its own integrity, underlying argument, and inner movement” (p. 317).

He goes on to say:

it makes no sense to see Paul’s letters as successive drafts of a ‘systematic theology,’ so that, for instance, Galatians might be a first draft and Romans a final draft of essentially the same script. Galatians and Romans of course cover similar topics up to a point. But whereas Galatians is written in haste and heat to say, *Under no circumstances must you get circumcised and take on the Torah*, Romans is written at more leisure and with

more compositional care to say, *You must work out the gospel-shaped balance of Jew and Greek*. It isn't that he is 'anti-law' in Galatians and 'pro-law' in Romans. That kind of shallow analysis has long had its day. It is, rather, that he can see one kind of danger in Galatia and realizes that it must be headed off immediately. He can see another, more long-term danger in Rome, and he decides to draw on his entire lifetime of biblical and pastoral reflection to construct a work that ought to ward off what to him would be the utter nonsense of a Jesus movement that was now eager to leave its Jewish and scriptural roots behind" (pp. 321–322).

Further, Wright notes,

Romans... is a many-sided letter, but with a single line of thought. It would be silly to try to give an adequate summary of it in a book like the present one. Those who want to do business with Paul the man, Paul the thinker, Paul the pastor and preacher will sooner or later want to sit down and try to figure it out for themselves. Reading it straight through at a sitting, perhaps often, is something few modern readers attempt, though it is of course how it would first have been heard, when Phoebe from Cenchreae, having been entrusted with it by Paul, would have read it out loud in the congregations in Rome. She probably expounded it too, answering the questions that would naturally arise. It would then have been copied and read again and again, normally straight through. We may then assume that it was studied in shorter sections by some at least, particularly the teachers, in the Roman congregations, and indeed in the other churches to which copies would have been sent (we have early evidence of a copy in Ephesus from which the long list of greetings to Rome was omitted). (p. 327)

The book of Acts, having seen Paul finally in Rome, center and "radiator" henceforth of the Good News, leaves Paul with Peter and Barnabas and all the others such as Luke himself in the power of the Spirit and tradition to finish their respective courses. For Paul, Wright himself is favorable to possible visits to Spain and also returns to the home 'ports' of Antioch and Ephesus with the ultimate martyrdom under Nero according to Tradition.

Paul was martyred in Rome; you can still see his chains, so it is claimed, by the tomb where he is supposed to lie, in the church of St. Paul Outside the Walls. Once, in October 2008, I heard the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra there, playing Bruckner's magnificent Sixth Symphony as a command performance for Pope Benedict, who sat enthroned in the middle surrounded by a large number of cardinals. The music was impressive, but it provided me no clue, of course, as to whether Paul is really buried there. So the options divide, and then divide again. The first and most obvious is that Paul was killed in the persecution of Christians that followed the great fire of Rome in AD 64. It is perfectly possible that Paul and perhaps Peter as well were among the leaders rounded up and made to suffer the penalty for a disaster whose actual origins have remained unknown from that day to this. Paul, as a citizen, would have been entitled to the quick death of beheading with a sword rather than the slow, appalling tortures that Nero inflicted on many others or the upside-down crucifixion that tradition assigns to Peter. But even then, if Paul was killed in 64, that leaves two more years after the two that Luke mentions. Would that have been enough time for a visit to Spain? Quite possibly" (p. 392).

What matters most to Paul is classically expressed in his letter to the Philippians, a



gem nestled in the New Testament canon between our arch's keystone texts, Ephesians and Colossians:

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead... forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature be thus minded...” (Phil 3:8–16 *passim*)

As he had said earlier in this letter, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). His direct encounter with the Incarnate Word,

not taught nor received from any man but the One speaking from the blinding light — “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” — was an event so crucial as to be recounted four times, once in St. Paul’s opening epistolary salvo to his “foolish Galatians” and three times in Acts itself, as well as being alluded to in the list of witnesses to the Resurrection in I Corinthians 15:8. It made him a bona fide Apostle, a personal experience helping him throughout his apostolic ministry “to know Jesus the Anointed One and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).

Wright recognizes the received opinion of the priority in time of the letters to the church at Thessalonica, written from Corinth early on in Paul’s European mission, and gives that correspondence “second place” in his proposed timeline. His reasons for connecting Galatians with the first missionary journey and the Antioch and Jerusalem “affairs,” long before any call to “come over and help us” from the European side of the Aegean Sea

would have put him there, seem quite convincing. He sees a sort of an arch-within-the-arch in the two letters to the Corinthians, still keystoned by Ephesians/Colossians, coupled with Philippians and Philemon. Rebuffed by the Corinthians with whom he has spent so much time, suddenly imprisoned at Ephesus, Paul has time to reflect and write and prepare for finally coming to Rome as noted above.

In summing up, in the final chapter, *The Challenge of Paul*, Wright says,

When we ask why Paul, with seventy or eighty pages of text to his name in the average Bible, succeeded far beyond the other great letter writers of antiquity — the Ciceros, the Senecas — and for that matter the great intellectuals and movement founders of his day and ours, this range of writing, from the urgent to the winsome, from the prophetic to the poetic, from intellectual rigor to passionate advocacy, must be central to the answer. The man who could write Philemon and Romans side by side was a man for all moments (p. 420).

And a few pages later:

The Stoics, the Epicureans, and the up-and-coming Middle Platonists had serious, articulate, and in many ways attractive spokespeople. With hindsight, however, Paul's Jesus-focused vision of the One God, creator of all, was able to take on all these philosophies and beat them at their own game. They were all, in the last analysis, ways of understanding the world and ways of finding a coherent and meaningful human path within it. When later generations wanted to articulate the Christian version of the same thing (which was, to say it once more, the Jewish version with the Jesus-based reframing), it was to Paul that they looked for help. Of course, other sources remained vital. The prologue to the Gospel of John, a piece of

writing that I think would have had Paul himself on his knees, is an obvious example. But it was Paul's robust engagements with the triple traditions of Israel, Greece, and Rome and his translation of them all into the shape of Jesus and the spirit (Jesus as Israel's Messiah and the spirit as the agent of resurrection, the ultimate hope of Israel) that offered a platform for the great thinkers of subsequent generations (p. 428).

A good friend of the Abbey and annual retreatant for many years was just with us while this review was in its birth/death throes. She had just bought/been given this book for retreat reading and, although at first encounter was put off, later found it truly engrossing. However, disappointed by the lack of reference to the Eucharist, she feels it is important that the writer, a (retired) bishop of the Church of England, be identified as not High Church/Anglo-Catholic, but a sturdy "low evangelical" — certainly closer to tent-meeting revival rallies than incensed and rood-screened altars. So, be warned, perhaps put off? But even so—read!

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here [in prison] for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice (Phil 1:15–18).

"Paul, you are mad; your great learning is turning you mad! . . . In a short time you think to make me a Christian!" And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am — except for these chains." (Acts 26:24, 28–29) ❌



## PRODIGAL RECONCILIATION

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*from page 9*

over my head.” It was what we would call imperfect contrition.

Perfect contrition is being sorry for your sins because you love God deeply and are sorry that you’ve offended the Lord whom you love so much. Imperfect contrition is being sorry because you’re afraid of going to hell! You’re afraid of being punished for what you’ve done.

Now obviously it’s much better to have perfect contrition — but the really good news is that you only need to have imperfect contrition to receive God’s forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. That’s what Jesus is telling us in this parable. The father was no fool. He knew his son. He knew why his son finally made the decision to return. It was *not* primarily because of love; it was first and foremost because of fear! He was afraid that he was going to die from hunger. But the father didn’t care. He loved his son and was just happy to have him back. God loves us so much— he is so eager to forgive us— that imperfect contrition — fear of the consequences of our actions — is good enough for God.

Now we get to the actual confession — the second step in the reconciliation process. When the Prodigal Son finally met his father face to face, the first thing he did was to confess his guilt — clearly and honestly. To his credit, he didn’t try to minimize what he had done. He didn’t make any lame excuses for his behavior. He called his sin “sin” — “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.” Of course the Father forgives his son; no questions asked. There are no snide remarks. “Oh, *now* you’re sorry, after all your money has run out!” He reads his son’s heart, he hears the words of imperfect repentance, and that’s good enough — which is precisely the way it is with us after we go to confession. God forgives and he also “forgets” — which means that the sin

he’s forgiven never comes between us and him again. He knows we did it (of course — God knows everything!), but he treats us as if we had never done it.

We receive absolution in confession when the priest says, “I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The father doesn’t recite formal words of absolution but his absolution is implicit in his actions. The embrace, the kiss, the new clothes, the ring, the party, the feast . . . The son is forgiven!

Finally we come to satisfaction or penance. This is an act of self-mortification or devotion performed to show sorrow for sin. One could say that it is an attempt to try to undo whatever negative consequences our sins have caused in the lives of others. We can do this through actions or through words. Praying for those we have sinned against is one way of making up for the negative effects of our sin.

Satisfaction is implicit, not explicit, in the story of the Prodigal Son. I think it can be reasonably assumed. If the son didn’t want to return to a life of poverty, hunger and swine herding, he would probably toe the line from now on.

Personally, I think he was so grateful to his father — and so thankful to be home — that he happily spent the rest of his life making amends for the things he had done in his past. Maybe his imperfect contrition eventually morphed into perfect contrition at some point.

Of course, the story of the Prodigal Son is a parable, so these particular individuals didn’t exist and the events related didn’t actually happen. But since Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, God Himself, told this story, it is important for us to get the message Jesus wanted us to get. If we are even a tiny bit sorry, even sorry because we just want to save our own skin, that is enough for God. All is forgiven. What a God! What a gift! Take advantage of it. Go to confession! ❄



## UPCOMING PREACHED RETREATS

### **SEPTEMBER 5-7**

The John Tradition: All You Need is Love

### **SEPTEMBER 7-9**

“Hacia Donde Apunta Tu Brujula Espiritual?”

### **SEPTEMBER 21-23**

Leadership & the Rule of  
Benedict: Obedience

### **SEPTEMBER 28-30**

The Desert Fathers

### **SEPTEMBER 29**

Enjoying the Holidays without  
Losing Your Sanity

### **OCTOBER 29-NOVEMBER 1**

Autumn Artists' Retreat

### **NOVEMBER 2-4**

Edith Stein: Her Journey  
from Darkness into Light

### **NOVEMBER 5-9**

Priests' Retreat: Challenges  
in Our Priestly Ministry

### **NOVEMBER 21-23**

Thanksgiving at Valyermo

### **NOVEMBER 23-25**

Becoming the Praise of His Glory:  
The Spirituality of St.  
Elizabeth of the Trinity

### **NOVEMBER 30-DECEMBER 2**

Advent Retreat

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**[SAINTANDREWSABBEY.COM](http://SAINTANDREWSABBEY.COM)** (Click the Guest House link)

For reservations, call the retreat office: (661) 944-2178

**NOTE:** Many have enquired about the music being written and performed by FR. ANGELUS. You are invited to share in his website of original music at: [angelusecheverry.com](http://angelusecheverry.com)

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